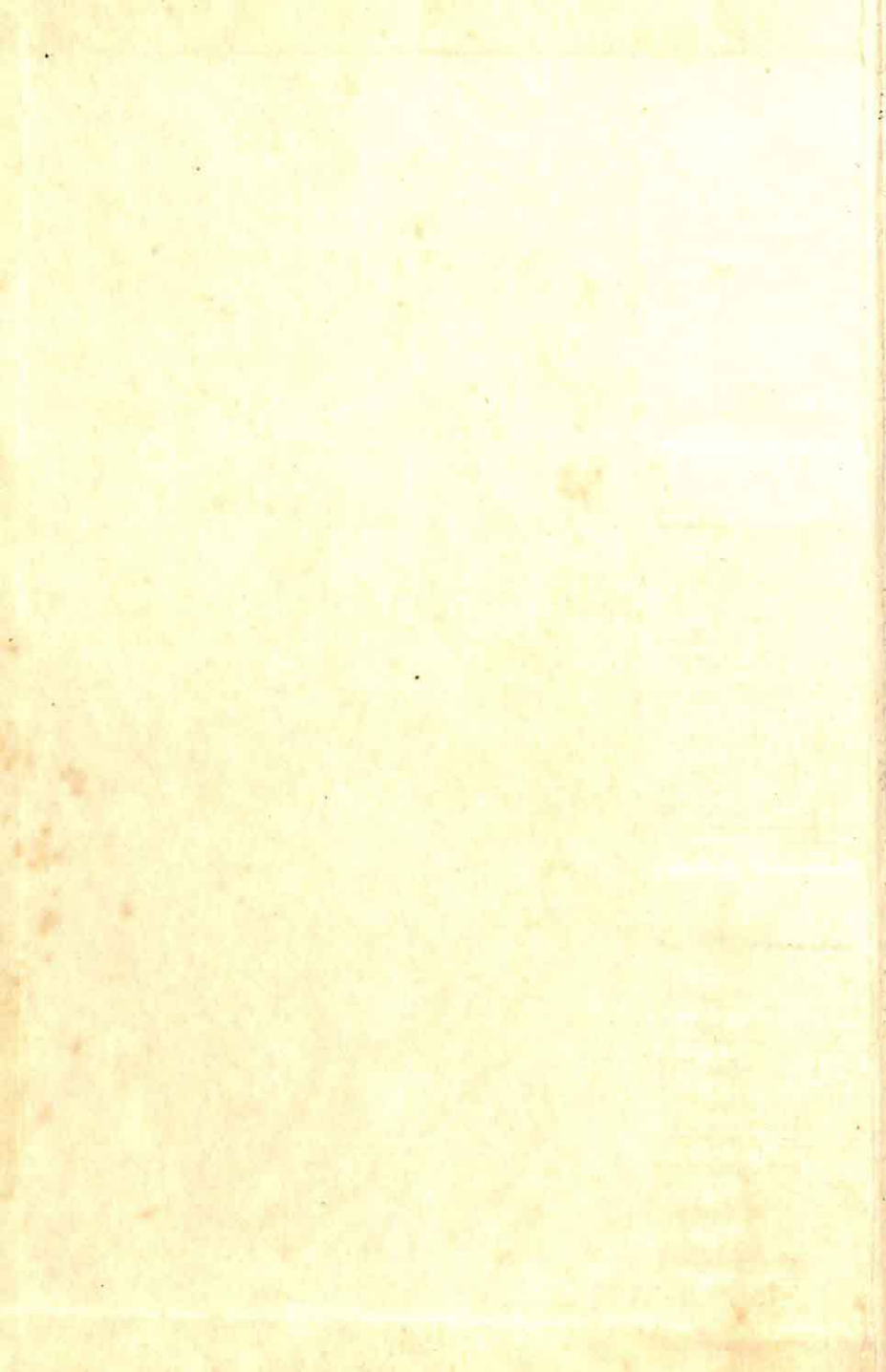


TEACHING
THE MOTHER-TONGUE
IN SECONDARY
SCHOOLS

R. CURRY



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TEACHING THE MOTHER TONGUE
IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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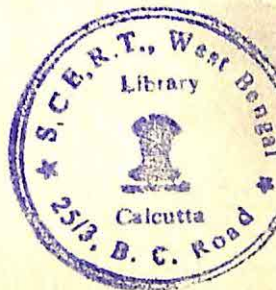
by
P. GURREY

Physical wandering is still important, but greater still is the power of man's spiritual adventures—adventures of thought, adventures of passionate feeling, adventures of aesthetic feeling.

A. N. WHITEHEAD: *Science & the Modern World.*



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To
THE GRANDCHILDREN: CHRISTOPHER,
MARILYN, NICOLA, KEVIN, JAMIE, SARA





PREFACE

It is so easy, you know, to keep on doing and thinking the same things just because for generations those are the things that have been thought and done. And it is also very dangerous, because, left to itself, humanity has a tendency to keep grinding around in the same grooves.

Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead as recorded by LUCIEN PRICE.

INCREASING school children's command of their mother tongue and improving their responses to it is to-day of first concern for all peoples, now more than ever before, and especially for us in this country, as well as for all English-speaking members of the Commonwealth. Peoples speaking other tongues do not everywhere give the attention that we do to the way their children are taught their mother tongue—'their hearth language', as it is called; though a sound training in the mother tongue is the natural basis of a good education. As the study of what is done in other countries is often very helpful, teachers in other lands may find in what is offered here something of value to them, even though it is only one person's view of the teaching of the mother tongue. But this work is mainly intended for those who have not yet reached finality in their thinking about their teaching, who are still learning, and who have open minds that are still alight with the spirit of curiosity, adventure and the will to *know*. The hopeful, but tremulous, question that is put to them now is 'Will some of the ideas and suggestions in this book stimulate further thought, enquiry, experiment?'

I would like to acknowledge the debt of gratitude that I owe to the students and colleagues who in the past, by

their questions, suggestions and criticisms, have incited me to think and talk about the teaching of English in secondary schools. I wish also to thank especially Mr. C. W. Booth of the Ontario Department of Education, Professor B. C. Diltz of the Ontario College of Education, Miss N. C. Martin and Mr. J. N. Britton of the University of London Institute of Education, Miss P. E. Bartlett of the White-lands Training College and Miss M. L. Collins of the Croydon High School for Girls (G.P.D.S.T.), for their suggestions and criticisms, which have been so helpful in the revisions of this book.

P.G.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
CHAP.	
I. FIRST PRINCIPLES	I
II. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MOTHER TONGUE	6
III. THE NATURE OF THE TASK	13
IV. AIMS IN TEACHING A MOTHER TONGUE	19
V. THE THEORY OF LIMITED OBJECTIVES	23
VI. PLANNING METHODS AND PROCEDURES	30
VII. SPEAKING	35
VIII. SILENT READING	43
IX. READING FOR INFORMATION, AND READING AND THINKING	52
X. READING ALOUD	60
XI. IS LITERATURE SO IMPORTANT?	68
XII. WRITING	73
XIII. THE CORRECTING OF WRITTEN WORK	93
XIV. GRAMMAR	100
XV. THE MECHANICS OF LANGUAGE	112
XVI. WHY POETRY?	118
XVII. POETRY IN THE CLASSROOM	126
XVIII. A TRAINING IN ELEMENTARY CRITICISM	142
XIX. DRAMA	152

XX. THE MOTHER TONGUE IN TECHNICAL EDUCATION	173
XXI. TEACHER AND PUPIL	193
XXII. FURTHER ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS	202
APPENDIX A: EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES	209
APPENDIX B: EXAMPLES OF PUPILS' CORRECTIONS OF WRITTEN WORK	211
BIBLIOGRAPHY	214
INDEX	219

I

FIRST PRINCIPLES

His [Plato's] insistence on the need, for those who are to direct community life, for a clear vision of ultimate aims, a definite scheme of values, based on cultural and scientific study, and training in the arts, conducted in such a way as to develop clear and fearless thinking and disinterested action.

F. M. CORNFORD: *The Republic of Plato.*

THE advice of wise men was ever: 'Return to First Principles'; and in these days of shifting values, lowered standards and conflicting issues, it is not likely that we shall understand the full importance of our task of teaching the mother tongue unless we follow that advice. Unfortunately, what these first principles are is not always clear; at the outset therefore we have to search for them, weighing up possibilities and testing the value of each suggestion. The search may not be wholly successful; nevertheless it will force us to examine the foundations of our beliefs about education and the intimate relation of the mother tongue to the mind and personality of the growing child.

It is indeed necessary to examine the principles of the teaching of the mother tongue in order to perceive clearly the valuable contribution that this teaching can make to the education of children. Especially those of us who are engaged on this task, or who are in any way able to influence it (as heads of schools, inspectors, training college tutors—or as textbook writers), need to have a precise understanding of the part that the mother tongue plays in the development of children, and how the teaching of

the mother tongue is related to the other school subjects. For, as teachers of the mother tongue, or as persons responsible for this teaching, even if but remotely, we are all concerned with the education of the child, not merely with a school subject, or with a utility skill, or with children's examinations.

Our enquiry will not be easy, for a great diversity of method and material is to be found in recommendations for the teaching of the mother tongue. We have therefore to ask ourselves what, in all these recommendations, is truly essential to the full development of the child. And when we try to answer such a question, we shall find that we must find answers also to such questions as 'What gain is there to a growing mind to put into words what it is conscious of?'—'In what ways do the personalities of children profit from classroom dramatic activities?'—'Why is poetry of particular value to secondary school children?'—'What kinds of language training will improve children's ability to learn?'

On the one hand, finding answers to questions like these helps us to arrive at a better understanding of the nature of the task that confronts us as teachers of the mother tongue, and therefore to achieve a sounder handling of the subject. On the other, the search for satisfying answers leads us towards a discovery of the first of our first principles, for it reveals the importance of the work, it strengthens our trust in the subject as a valuable educational instrument, and it reminds us of the potentialities of the language itself. Therefore our critical and persevering enquiry will convince us that we may unhesitatingly follow the advice 'As a first principle, pin your faith to the mother tongue.'¹

Nevertheless, in the day-to-day teaching of language

¹ J. R. Firth: *Speech*.

the simpler tasks and the necessary routine exercises often do not appear to be of value or to have any worthwhile results. Similarly, in pupils' search for the exact contribution of a word to its context, or for the grammatical relationship of a clause to a closely reasoned argument, the underlying purpose of the language training may be obscured by a teacher's conscientious demands for hair-splitting precision. Therefore faith in the true value of the work must be strong; it needs also to be firmly established on a sound basis of reason and philosophy. The ever-present danger is that a teacher may unknowingly fall into a mechanical routine, which, though it may have the virtue of conserving his energies, will rob his teaching of its spontaneity and spirit. His frequent return to first principles is necessary to keep his work fresh and alive.

A firmly established faith in the work is essential, too, if one's teaching is to be of high quality. This faith is more important than technical skill, and perhaps has not always been prized sufficiently in educational circles. It is true that some of the best teachers have not needed to thrash out a philosophy of their subject in argument with themselves or with others, or by reading and thinking. These have a faith and certainty about their subject that have grown up with them; and their sensitive appreciation and critical judgment have helped them to become aware of the fine potentialities not only of the language, but also of the minds and the personalities of children. But for most of us, wide reading, thorough discussion, never-satisfied thinking, and drastically criticized experiment are necessary if we are to achieve a conviction of the great value and the urgency of a careful training in the mother tongue for every child.

The importance of reading, discussion and thought about first principles and the philosophy of one's subject

constitutes one of the strongest reasons for the retention of a year of training at the beginning of a teaching career (though not necessarily before a year or two of experience—possibly other than teaching). For the year of training may offer the only opportunity that a student will have for a carefree study of the philosophy of his subject and of education. This year of post-graduate study in education is especially necessary for those who have not taken philosophy as a degree subject, or who have not had, during their undergraduate years, any training in the discipline of letters or mathematics, for it enables them to discover the true nature of the subject that they will teach, and to build up a faith in the work—a faith that will carry them through the periods of difficulty and infelicity of spirit that we all go through.

But dislike of the training year, distrust of its methods and content, and even antagonism to it, can still be met with among heads of schools. One of the main causes of these attitudes was possibly the neglect in training colleges and university departments of the proper study of the value and aims of the school subjects and of the ultimate ends of education. That neglect is largely a thing of the past, though it may be that in some places, still, insufficient time is given to the study and discussion of the principles and philosophy of education. This study should be given a prominent place throughout the training year, for it is not knowledge of the methodology of a subject that is needed most by a teacher, but a steadfast faith in the worth of his work—and self-confidence. These, however, need to be based on skill in handling the subject, on an understanding of children, and on an appreciation of their inexpert attempts to use and respond to language.

As we have said, the search for first principles leads us

to enquire about the deeper purposes of education. We ask ourselves therefore 'Do we know the end we have in view when we attempt to educate children?' Answers to such a question may provoke further self-questioning: 'Is it enough to wish to pass on what we ourselves have enjoyed?'—'Is it enough to feel strongly that the mother tongue has a significant bearing on the mental development of children?'—'Is it enough to see that language is manifestly at the focal point of education, without studying the implications of this observation?' Enthusiasms and certainties concerning the passing on of 'the torch of learning', the influence of language on mental development, and language as the focal point of education, are of inestimable worth in teaching—let us not decry them or sourly depreciate them. Nevertheless, inner convictions are not enough. Our responsibilities to the pupils we teach and the indefinable nature of much of our work must impel us to reason out our convictions and our aims, and to formulate for ourselves a philosophy of education that will be a sound and true foundation for our work; but in this formulating we should surely take to heart the advice of Roger Bacon: 'Do not trust in the triple argument: this has precedent, this is customary, this is the common view.'¹

The purpose of philosophy is to know, not the thoughts of men, but the truth of things.

ST. THOMAS AQUINAS: *Commentary on Aristotle's De Caelo et Mundo*.

¹ Quoted in *The Mediaeval Mind* by H. O. Taylor.

II

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MOTHER TONGUE

A man's proper vernacular is nearest unto him, in as much as it is more closely united to him, for it is singly and alone in his mind before any other.

DANTE: *De Vulgari Eloquentia*.

THERE are three sturdy reasons for making special arrangements in schools for the teaching of the mother tongue—such as appointing specialists; selecting only those who have an interest in language to teach the subject as non-specialists; allocating not less than five periods of English a week for every form in the school; arranging for *extra* free periods for the teachers of English. These three reasons are (i) the mother tongue is the medium of instruction for most of the school subjects, so that competence in the use of the mother tongue is very often necessary for the acquisition of exact knowledge; (ii) it is the medium in which much of our thinking is carried on, so that improvement in using and responding to the mother tongue ensures improvement in thinking; (iii) it plays such an important part in almost every experience of every child and in the communication of those experiences to those around them—the mother tongue being the child's most valuable social instrument—so that improved skill in expression and in communication of his experiences enables the child to attain to greater mastery of his experience, both inner and social, and to grow in self-control and confidence.

These three reasons are of such importance in the education of children that many schools *as a matter of course* make the special arrangements for the teaching of English that are mentioned above; in addition, some heads of schools allot extra allowances for English books and organize the school library in co-operation with the English staff in order to promote the further study of English. But there are still many schools where the mother tongue is held cheap, and where it is not allowed to play its part at the focal point in education.

It is unnecessary to comment on these reasons, for they are self-evident to those who perceive that education is more than book-learning and greater than examination successes; nevertheless their importance warrants further discussion. We see, then, that the mother tongue has a very important rôle to play as the medium of instruction for most of the school subjects. Its chief value here is that it can be an exact instrument—for the explanation and formulation of knowledge, even for junior pupils. This is one reason why language is the focal point in education, for instruction in the 'knowledge' subjects *must* be carried on in exact language if our pupils are to master them—a fact that should have the widest recognition. One indisputable argument in favour of precise language from the beginning of secondary education is that young learners should not have to unlearn what has been stamped on their minds in inexact language by the force of first impressions. But there is the even more impelling reason that knowledge expressed in exact language is *truer*, and therefore more useful, than knowledge expressed in general or in imprecise language. It is also more clearly understood, and more perfectly remembered.

One of the chief distinguishing marks of the really first-rate teacher is that he uses, and insists on, exact language;

whereas the second-rate man does not concern himself sufficiently with the quality of the language that he and his pupils use in his lessons. The one secures clear and exact understanding of the facts, theories and principles of his subject, and he trains his pupils to think precisely about it, thus guaranteeing some mastery of the increasing difficulties of the subject as the study of it progresses. The other does not concern himself with precision of language in the early years, thinking that 'later on' exactness and accuracy in his subject can be imposed; but by then, owing to the insecure groundwork, there will be uncertainty in pupils' grasp of some of the essential facts, and therefore inability to understand fully or clearly the more difficult parts of the subject in the advanced work.

There should be no doubts in any teacher's mind that the knowledge of his subject will be sound and true *only* when it is expressed and recalled in precise language. We may be sure that no teacher of science, geography or manual craft would ever allow the inept and careless use of apparatus and tools, manipulated in the practical work of his subject, that is often allowed in explanation and discussion in lessons in English, history, geography, and occasionally even in mathematics, the exact subject *par excellence*.

The importance of a careful language training to improve the thinking of our pupils can hardly be over-emphasized. But all of our thinking or other mental activity does not make use of language as the medium for its operations, and certainly not all of our mental activity can be said to be 'thinking'; yet the more exact and the more logically developed types of thinking make use of some form of physical aid as its medium and 'scaffolding' in order to operate; for instance, such media as mathematical symbols, language, models, patterns, plans,

prototypes or replicas of real things may be used by the mind to enable it to think, and to be aware what its 'thoughts' are. And the more adaptable and *manageable* the medium, the scaffolding, the more efficient will be the thinking; furthermore, a mastery of the medium will enable the mind to carry out many different types of mental operation, and to carry these out efficiently. Of these media, language is the one that will be the most serviceable to the majority of us, because 'it is singly and alone' in our minds before any other.

We may not perhaps realize how varied are the types of mental operation that we and our pupils carry out with the help of language. We recall and describe memories of the past, express present attitudes and feelings, criticize, assess, make deductions, associate a diversity of creatures in metaphor and simile, rationalize unpleasant experience, paint past experiences in rosier colours, dramatize ourselves and others in tragic or romantic scenes of imagined vividness; and, more habitually, we compare, contrast, affirm, deny. With each of these some degree of wanting, wishing, willing, or intending will be blended, and each will be shot through with hopes or fears, self-confidence or self-distrust, or with some other feelings or emotions, transient or fast-dyed; and all will be spun into the continuous and variegated pattern of our life. Language participates in these mental operations in varying degrees, and in varying degrees of clarity or vagueness, of close-structured or of disjoint configuration.

This brings us to our third point: the central part played by the mother tongue in children's experience and in the communication of that experience in the social circles in which they move. Though for a few children, not language, but visual imagery will be the 'form', the scaffolding, to enable consciousness to know what it has in mind, every-

thing being 'thought of' and understood in pictures, seen inwardly, often with the clarity and vividness of reality; yet for the great majority the mother tongue will be the predominating medium for all forms of experience and conscious knowledge. And we may be sure that full understanding of experience and certainty of knowledge will come to the majority *only* through the efficient use of the mother tongue. Nevertheless, though the mother tongue enters into the child's life in so many ways, at so many points, for so many purposes, and for so long a period, yet this fuller understanding and conscious knowing is usually brought to some certainty and exact awareness only as the child progresses through the school. For it is the school that demands from him the communication in clear language of what he knows; and only throughout his school life does he have a thorough training in listening and understanding, even though he may not ever be active in discussion; but this training will be exact and thorough only if his teachers have high standards for the expression of knowledge and thought.

In the expression of experience the mother tongue very often has both a quickening and a completing function in a series of linked happenings. In the early stages of an experience that has some significance for us, language often helps to bring about success, and in the final stage it will often be the predominating activity in completing and rounding off the experience.

For instance, we think of making something; we plan in imagination what we shall do, and put in train the actions to achieve our end, such as buying tools, patterns, materials. The making of the article may take a long time, and our daily lives may become more and more involved in the project, and often the rest of the household will begin to show interest and to feel anxiety. Finally the

manual part of the task is completed. We look back and note how often and how usefully language came into the linked series of events—in furthering our plans, and enabling us to achieve our objective, and in many ways helping us to achieve greater success—and personal satisfaction. Language often will complete the experience and round off the pattern of events in such forms, for a small boy, as a parent's proud praise or the boy's shy display of the finished product in the family circle, perhaps with explanations of the difficulties and how he surmounted them. Later, doubtless, he would savour the satisfaction of his experience again by repeating the story to his special friends and school acquaintances. Adequate command of the mother tongue would ensure that all these interwoven linguistic threads in the full pattern will not only be successful, but will increase the satisfactions and pleasures of the maker; thus adding in some small measure to his stature, and fostering the development of his personality. Not the least gain is that he will see himself as a person playing a useful and recognized part in the social milieu in which he moves.

What makes the adequate use of the mother tongue so vitally important for the growing child is that in expressing his experiences when he communicates them to others, the child reveals them to himself. Thus, and perhaps only thus, can he perceive their importance or unimportance to himself, and their value or lack of value. It is through this clearer awareness and perception of value that he learns to control his experiences, and to control his reactions to them. In this way, for instance, a small deprivation of something greatly desired (such as a promised treat) can be borne by a small boy or girl with fortitude, and will no longer appear as an insuperable frustration and as the end of all happiness, letting loose uncontrollable tears.

It is by using language to express his experience, even when the language used is imperfect and incomplete, as it often is, that the child is able to form *concepts* related to his experience, and so to perceive it and to understand it. Naturally, very much of what he is conscious of eludes expression in words, because experience always flows on continuously and without pause; but having once pinned down a fragment in words, he can form a concept about it, because he can then view this fragment of experience with some degree of objectivity, and can therefore control it, if he so desires. In all of this the more adequate is his command of his mother tongue, the better in quality and effectiveness will be his expression and his concepts, and therefore his understanding and control.

Continual improvement in the use of the mother tongue will also enable him to improve the *quality* of his experience: his language then may become a precision instrument, sharpening his intelligence and making him more clearly aware of what he does and of what happens to him. We see, therefore, his mother tongue as a living, shaping activity, and as one of the ever-present currents of consciousness, with a quickening influence in his life; and not as an additional, adventitious skill, like typing or sending Morse, or merely as a utilitarian achievement desirable for the furthering of his career. This forces us to remember always how important his mother tongue is to him, and how important for him is our task of helping him to improve his use of it, though he will not be aware at all of this importance.

They [words] are the mighty instruments by which thoughts are excited and by which alone they can be expressed in a rememberable form.

S. T. COLERIDGE: *Philosophical Lectures*.

III

THE NATURE OF THE TASK

. . . so many people having to say and write more than they have the skill to express plainly. . . .

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION: *Language.*

IN secondary education the teacher of the mother tongue is essentially a language teacher; but, one may object, his pupils can already speak and write the language, and can understand much of the literature that is appropriate to their years. If that is so, what, then, is the nature of the task? And, we may ask, why is it thought to be so difficult that specialists are needed to 'teach' it? Cannot *any* speaker of the mother tongue teach it?

Specialists for teaching the mother tongue are needed because the younger school-children can have no idea of what they ought to achieve, no standards of language usage, and no notion of what is valuable in language and literature. Furthermore, many pupils have only a rough-and-ready command of language, and they are content with their limited proficiency, not knowing that their intellectual growth may depend solely on an improvement in their use of and response to their mother tongue. The language they speak and hear seems to them to be fully adequate, for it has long been the language of their daily lives, and equal to all the simple demands made on it. Therefore, because there is no curiosity or felt need for it, a teacher requires special skill to be able to initiate and maintain progress in the use of the mother tongue. He needs also a specially intelligent interest in language,

particularly in the immature use of the mother tongue, in order to be able to help each pupil to become so proficient in using language that his oral and written work in every subject gains in precision and clarity—with the consequent gain to his thinking and the habitual expression of his thoughts.

The improvement of pupils' thinking and of their skill in communicating thought, factual knowledge, intention, etc., is so important that it is essential for every school to have at least one English specialist, and perhaps at least one for every fifty or sixty pupils. English specialists are needed because the task is both difficult and indeterminate. It is difficult partly because language cannot be taught effectively *in vacuo*, so that 'content' crops up at every turn and a teacher has to deal with the understanding and with the truth or value of facts, theories, ideas, arguments, and of fictitious and real events; and so becomes often more concerned with living than simply with language.

The task is indeterminate partly because language abilities and weaknesses are elusive, their origins are indefinite and often complex; and the problem of improving pupils' use of language is obscure, as well as being undemonstrable. Consequently even the most courageous of specialists will sometimes feel his self-confidence is tottering when, in front of a class, he suddenly realizes that he is asking himself: 'Whatever training can I give these pupils that will increase the competence of their thinking and expression?'

The nature of the task is similar to the teaching of a craft, for it is essentially one of developing skills; but not teaching language as one teaches a new language. It is the training of pupils' language abilities so that they can make more effective use of the language they already know—'know' in the sense that they can make some use of it and

are able to make some response to it. But this training will not be, *primarily*, teaching children to spell, punctuate, and write complete sentences. The correct use of these simple mechanics of language is easy to teach compared with the task of increasing pupils' skill in using language clearly and expressively. It is therefore very necessary for the teacher of English in a secondary school to keep this more important task in mind, and to strive continually to achieve some success in it; so that he and his classes will not be for ever wading in a morass of mechanical detail, when they should be trying to express thought, knowledge and experience clearly and accurately.

We should remember that our pupils' skill in using language is not inevitably increased by their being taught facts *about* language, and that the help such facts give to most pupils is very meagre indeed. We note that the mother tongue, unlike history, geography, science, has no body of firm fact to be learned and remembered: there is only this medium of expression, language, to be practised and mastered. Thus it is habit-forming not fact-learning that we have to consider—and promote. The teaching of the mother tongue, therefore, differs considerably from the teaching of the 'knowledge' subjects, though the best teachers of those subjects concern themselves more with training their pupils to think historically, or geographically, or scientifically, than with 'ramming home the facts', which is the aim (often frankly admitted) of some less perceptive teachers. Non-specialists particularly need to be aware of this difference, for they have to resist the temptation to treat English as a 'knowledge' subject, by emphasizing such factual matter as grammatical definition, verse patterns, the rules of punctuation; and thus miss the real nature of their task.

A teacher of the mother tongue would not go far wrong

if he were to regard his main task as 'developing his pupils' skill in using language *in various ways and for various purposes*'. This would clarify his thinking and planning by helping him to get rid of some of the lumber that we all accumulate in our minds and attics as we go through life. The rest of the work might also be described quite simply as the duty of improving the quality of pupils' responses to language in listening and reading. This, however, does not mean being satisfied with a pupil's bare understanding of a plain piece of writing; such a poor response to easy material will not be accepted by a good teacher. He will try to improve the *quality* of his pupils' responses to language, to sharpen their powers of understanding, and to bring into focus and to correct their imaginative vision of all that a writer presents in his writing. It follows then that the teaching of the mother tongue calls for special abilities and interests; of these a sensitive responsiveness to words and a clear conception of the nature of his task are as important to a teacher as teaching skill and a mastery of teaching techniques.

But though the task may seem to be within one's competence, to achieve even moderate success is not easy, or always possible. So much more than intellectual gifts and technical skill is needed: one needs determination, a sense of humour, and the ability to accept genially the imperfect efforts of one's pupils when those efforts are the best they can do. On the linguistic side, the work needs constant attention to meanings and the expression of meaning, and a wise scrupulousness concerning language and children's use of language. Above all, it needs an unflinching interest in growing minds and in the unfolding personalities of the young, and especially a sensitive perception of the qualities of children's thinking and expression that can achieve no more than partial success.

It is no wonder, therefore, that some teachers turn away from these demanding requirements and concentrate on the easier and more factual aspects of language, on the kinds of work that show immediate results, and that pupils can attempt without much thought, such as sentence completing, gap filling and word matching, simple analysis. These can be corrected easily, they admit of a definite right or wrong, and the teaching of them does not involve any puzzling problems. But if that is all the children do, they may never meet with the problems of expression and communication that they should be trying to solve—if their handling of their mother tongue is to improve; and they may never make use of language for the many purposes that are natural to them in their daily lives.

Unfortunately, it is not always evident in pupils' handling of language where the special difficulties are, or what is hampering improvement. So that, when no improvement can be seen, doubts and queries may rise and assail the none-too-tranquil life of a teacher, harassing him at his work with their sniping: 'Can pupils' writing improve without copious practice?'—'Does imitation of model passages have any effect?'—'Can grammar exercises help at all, or are they useful only in dealing with mistakes?'—'Is there any value in teaching grammar unless the pupils *apply* what they have learnt?'—'Can, for instance, correct recognition of subordinate clauses foster a more skilful use of them?'

It is evident that the teacher of the mother tongue needs to do some hard thinking about his aims and his beliefs, and about his plans to develop appreciation, independent thinking, a sense of language, and a critical attitude to expression. Merely following a text-book will enable him to side-step this duty of achieving insight into the true nature of his task; and it may effect no improvement in

his pupils' work and bring him little pleasure in his teaching. But with realistic thinking that faces fundamental issues, a teacher's daily task can develop his creative craftsmanship and give him unfailing satisfaction, for he will see the abilities of his pupils gradually blossoming, and their understanding and appreciation bearing fruit as his own insight and skill increase, and as his attack on the main task becomes more direct and assured.

We must cultivate a feeling for the imaginative qualities in the use of words and a sensitiveness to their finer nuances of connotation, especially in poetry, if we are to know genuinely and intimately our mother tongue as employed by its best writers and speakers.

C. L. WRENN: *The English Language*.

IV

AIMS IN TEACHING A MOTHER TONGUE

Success or failure will depend upon our perception of the true purpose of the instrument and the right method of handling it.

Ministry of Education: *The Teaching of English in England.*

THE teacher who clearly understands the nature of his task will have two predominant aims in his teaching: training his pupils to use their mother tongue effectively, and training them to respond appropriately to it in listening and reading. The first of these covers speaking and writing. The second ranges from an understanding of simple ideas, expressed in easy sentences, to the accurate awareness of all that a great poem or prose passage can convey. Even with those two main objectives constantly in mind there are difficulties to be faced, particularly the difficulty of driving steadily towards one of these objectives without having attention and effort frequently deflected away from it; but even more stubborn is the difficulty of finding out *how* to improve pupils' responsiveness in listening and reading, and *how* to improve their command of language in speaking and writing.

Now what else is important? Surely there is much more to be achieved. We must reply: 'There is nothing else that need give major concern or anxiety; for these two dominant tasks cover all that is laid down in courses of study, all that examinations can fairly demand, and all that is to be found in text-books for the teaching of English.' But

we may add that spelling should be dealt with as part of the learning of the established language customs, that punctuation has to be learned in order to be able to express meaning clearly or expressively, that paragraphing has to be taught so that pupils may learn to indicate in their writing that a new aspect of a subject is being introduced. We note also that the forms of the language must be learned correctly, for incorrect grammar confuses the mind of hearer or reader unaccustomed to it, that *précis* writing is an exercise to develop the succinct use of language, that good speech is necessary so that the single hearer, or a large audience, may hear and hear gladly.

All these minor tasks, then, should be part of the main task, and contribute to it. They should not be handled in isolation, as if they were important in themselves. Thus, a grammatical form or structure, when understood, could be assessed for the clarity, or ambiguity, or obscurity it produced in a paragraph or in a letter or in some instructions. Thus, Clause Analysis might show up a monotony of structure in a paragraph. So, too, improving the clarity and carrying power of pupils' voices might be worked into an informal production of a play; punctuation might be studied to find how differences of meaning and emphasis were brought about by it, or (for middle forms) to discover special usages, such as those to be found in law documents, proof reading, old texts. The principle here should be 'Nothing in isolation': a warning that is especially necessary as divorce among these topics is so easy, and so prevalent.

It is, however, most advisable for pupils to be shown or, better still, to discover how and what these topics contribute to the using and understanding of language, and their necessity in expression and communication. For

instance, towards the end of a lesson on the comma, one could say: 'Having practised the using of the comma, now let us find out what use a good writer makes of it. Find examples in your readers.' The few minutes spent on a small search of that kind may be worth all the rest of the lesson in driving home the need for care in punctuating: good punctuation is the result of care as much as of knowledge.

It is regrettable that the belief is still current that the main aims of the English teacher are to ensure that his pupils know the facts of grammar, to teach them how to write a good 'school' essay, and to inform them about the great literary figures of the past and their works. Such conceptions of the English teacher's work are unsatisfactory for they are incomplete and superficial, and compared with the ideals and objectives of many teachers to-day, they are unenlightened and out-of-date. A responsible teacher will now aim at doing something for his pupils that is very much more valuable.

In teaching written English, for instance, good teachers do not aim merely at developing competence in producing a formal school essay or a set number of words in précis writing ('Reduce to a third of the length'—whatever the passage!). They attempt to develop *skill in expression*, and such understanding of the process that each pupil begins to feel responsibility for expressing what he has in mind, and some confidence in his ability to do so. Again, in the teaching of reading, the specialist does not stick complacently to the plain understanding of a text; but attempts to extend his pupils' power and range of thought by leading them to suggest deductions, comparisons, relationships and other associations of what they have found in their reading. And, in the teaching of literature and drama, the wise teacher nowadays is not satisfied only

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with his pupils' acquisition of factual knowledge, however exact and complete; he tries also to train them to respond appropriately to the poem or play, so that the impression of it will be deep and lasting, and the enjoyment sincere.

The best teachers of the mother tongue (like some of their colleagues who also see the true value of the training that they give to their pupils) now use their subject to enable their pupils to grow and develop in mind and spirit. Thus their pupils will not only acquire mechanical skill with language; but with the help of literature and drama, and the free expression of their interests, experiences and knowledge, and a critical assessment of this expression, they will also become better and more intelligent human beings. This more modern conception of the subject makes it one of the most potent instruments for training and developing the powers and abilities of the pupil, and for ensuring that his development will be well-balanced, natural and intrinsic. The English teacher is also less likely than in former days to be unaware that 'The purpose of words, though philosophers seem to forget this simple fact, is to deal with matters other than words'¹; he will not therefore treat the child merely as 'a language-user' and 'a reactor to language', but as a whole living being.

Youth ought to be instructed betimes, and in the best things; for we hold those longest we take soonest, as the first scent of a vessel lasts, and the tinct the wool first receives.

BEN JONSON: *Discoveries*.

¹ Bertrand Russell: *An Enquiry into Meaning and Truth*.

V

THE THEORY OF LIMITED OBJECTIVES

The surest way for a learner in this, as in other cases, is not to advance by jumps and large strides . . . but let it be as little at once as may be, that its advances may be clear and sure.

JOHN LOCKE: *On the Conduct of the Understanding.*

WE have looked briefly at the two general aims that every teacher of the mother tongue should always be striving to achieve. We have emphasized how essential it is for a teacher to give thought to this matter of aims in teaching language; and how necessary it is for him to examine his reasons for teaching his subject in the way that he normally adopts; and we have stressed the importance of formulating the principles underlying the subject he teaches. It is, however, generally recognized that all this is a personal matter, and the responsibility of the individual; and it is true that the best teaching is an individual and personal matter, for it is the expression of a man's convictions, and of his faith in the particular principles that give his work a rational foundation and a purpose that goes far beyond his own personal satisfactions and ambitions.

When we come to look at the work in the classroom, we find there, too, a need for thinking out what one wants to achieve within the narrow limits of a single lesson or series of lessons; but with the actual lesson looming ahead, the planning has to be on a strictly practical level. Examination of principles will lead to an understanding of the general purpose of the work; but a close consideration of

the special needs of the pupils will often lead to a sound choice of an objective for the lesson. The choice of a single objective and the planning and carrying out of the lesson, with that objective giving direction and a definite end in view, comprise a most useful and effective teaching technique. It is an essential technique, though many a good teacher may not be aware of his making use of it, or be able to state his objective precisely; nevertheless he will know what he wants to teach, the purpose of his lesson, and what his pupils are to do in it.

It is obvious, of course, that such aspects of the subject as reading, grammar, drama, are far too general to be thought of as objectives for single lessons. A very much more restricted topic has to be selected. Often, no doubt, it is best to choose one weakness for undivided attention in a lesson, and to narrow down one's objective drastically: for instance, when taking a play of Shakespeare with a poor class. But in achieving a main objective one or two subsidiary objectives can sometimes be attained, as in a discussion on a novel that is being read, when progress both in oral expression and in appreciation may be successfully brought about.

The restricting of an objective, however, may lead to the choice of a superficial one. For instance, it is not sufficient to have in mind only 'I am taking a sonnet with Form Four'. The purpose of the work needs to be considered: 'Is the poem to be merely an example of a poet's art, or to illustrate some quality of his poetry; or, on the other hand, is it to be studied for its form and structure?' — 'Or is the lesson to whet the interest of the class and to encourage the pupils to read other poems by the same poet, or simply more poetry?' Of course a teacher will sometimes by chance hit on a worthwhile objective for a lesson without considering the point; but teaching the

mother tongue is too important for it to be a haphazard hit-or-miss affair; and one cannot expect to perceive, and find pleasure in, the gradual improvement in pupils' use of language and in their responses to literature and drama, unless the work develops in interest, in difficulty and in value through the year.

How much can be achieved in a single lesson in addition to the attainment of the main objective will depend, of course, on the kind of lesson one is giving; but though one objective should stand out clearly in the carrying out of the plan, and though a teacher should strive to achieve the one objective all through the lesson, yet he must be ready to change from his original objective to another, if some other, more important need or interest unexpectedly arises. For instance, in dealing with reading aloud, and in trying to improve enunciation, a teacher might notice that the poor enunciation was caused partly by poor breath control and faulty voice production, rather than by poor muscular effort and slipshod pronunciation. So he might shift attention to the conscious placing of the voice in front of the teeth and to the pupils' using more breath, rather than continue to concentrate on firmness and clarity of consonants.

The key to success in this matter of objective might well be to focus effort directly on one specific skill, and to make the attack on that one so direct and single-minded that the pupils could not fail to see exactly what they had to achieve, what standard they had to try to reach, and, at the end of the lesson, what they had actually achieved. Even if they saw only small progress, they would find the satisfaction in it that would give them confidence in themselves and in their teacher, and this would still further promote their willingness to co-operate with him.

The reason for having a limited objective in a lesson is clear: it is easier to achieve success, for the teacher knows exactly what abilities he is training, and the pupils have something definite to work for and to achieve. Without this clarity and this directed effort, school work can be apathetic, drifting along in a sluggish stream in which every little spurt forward wastes its effort against some snag, or is lost in idle backwater eddies.

A further reason for limiting objectives is that in teaching most of the school subjects there are often many items of knowledge that logically the pupils should be acquainted with in order to understand the material selected for a lesson; items that form a background to that material, or are essential for an understanding of it. For instance, in a literature lesson, in addition to the all-important understanding of the poem or prose passage, and the need for seizing its fine precision of meaning, there are items of information about the writer, the times, the place and occasion, that perhaps gave rise to the writing—all of which *may* have some bearing on the final work, and which *perhaps* contribute something to the full appreciation of it. But as there was for the writer a need for judicious selection and for restraint, so too for the teacher. His selection of literary fact needs to be wise, and also appropriate to his class; because what was necessary for writer and teacher is still more so for the pupils, especially as there is often so much for them to take in, and as their attention is so easily diverted.

A third reason for keeping a steady focus on one aspect of a topic is that teaching can so easily be side-tracked. Quite apart from the usual red-herrings that are generally pretty obvious, one gets held up inevitably in studying almost any kind of literature by the need to go into meanings of words, with the result that derivations or other

verbal points of interest catch the limelight, instead of the scene imagined and portrayed by the writer. With senior classes, often, over-conscientiousness may shift the light of attention to textual minutiae, under the untimely ideal of 'good scholarship'—untimely, because school boys and girls below a Sixth Form rarely have the experience, the techniques or the standards that are necessary for true scholarship.

In addition, an objective should be detailed, and if possible pointing forward to another worthwhile task. For instance, the objective for a lesson on Prose Study should not be merely 'a study of the structure', for that is too formal and analytic. If attention is to be given to structure, it would be better to make the objective 'a discovery of the structure of the passage in order to increase alertness of response to trains of thought and modifications of feeling'. Even with mediocre classes some adventurous reaching out for further values is often very well rewarded, although those values may not all be completely achieved. An unexpected adventure of the mind will usually catch the quick attention of a class, for it holds out a promise beyond the routine handling of a subject that may be only too familiar. It is not difficult to lead an intelligent class a very long way; but it is a great mistake with a mediocre or poor class to mark time on the ground that has been gone over and over; and a great mistake never to spur pupils on to surmount the unscaled wall of their own limitations—'unadventurous' would be a pitiable memory of one's opportunities to harbour in old age!

A further value in seeking worthwhile objectives is that deeper thinking about principles, values, standards, and the more far-seeing purposes of the work is encouraged. This will help the non-specialist to arrive at a sounder

and more appreciative conception of his task—he will no longer be satisfied with teaching in a mechanical way. He will attack the problem of improving reading, for instance, with a clearer understanding of the processes involved and its difficulties. Instead, therefore, of merely setting his pupils to read aloud one after the other, he would try to secure more exact comprehension, or more imaginative understanding of the characters, or a deeper realization of their motives and attitude to life. Similarly, he would handle the mechanical aspects of writing with more sense of their purpose, helping his pupils, for instance, to see the use of punctuation marks as directing signals to lead the reader's mind to move more closely *with* the writer's—perhaps even into strange, uncharted realms of experience or towards hitherto untrodden intellectual pastures.

This doctrine of a predominating objective in every lesson (or nearly every lesson) may appear too formal and theoretical; but in practice it need not be rigidly imposed, or too strictly adhered to, for it should be a help, not a hindrance. But our pupils' school years are so short, and the adverse influences on their language and thinking are so strong and pervasive, that a single-minded attack on the problems of better speaking, reading, writing, thinking, has now become very much more urgent. We can no longer countenance and tolerate the spineless, amorphous lesson that drifts along at the mercy of time and irrelevant question.

Persuade one point throughlie rather than teach many things scatteringly.

THOMAS NASHE: *The Anatomie of Absurditie*.

He that begins with the calf may carry the ox.

JOHN LOCKE: *On the Conduct of the Understanding*.

If you pour a glut of water upon the bottle, it receives little of it; but with a funnel, and by degrees, you shall fill many of them, and spill little of your own; to their capacity they will all receive and be full.

BEN JONSON: *Discoveries*.

VI

PLANNING METHODS AND PROCEDURES

My principles of method then are briefly these. First, do not hurry, for learning comes easily when the proper stage is reached. Second, avoid a difficulty which can be safely avoided, or at least postponed. Third, when the difficulty must be handled, make a boy's approach to it as gradual and as interesting as you can.

ERASMUS: *De Ratione Studii*.

THE next problem is to plan a method that will help to achieve a selected objective. One can often be devised specifically to deal with a selected weakness, say, in writing or reading, or with the development of a special skill. We might, for instance, decide to train a class of average pupils to speak more fluently and confidently. Before the planning we might consider what were the hindrances to connected, easily flowing speech. These might be (a) lack of ideas, (b) self-consciousness, (c) confusion of ideas. It would be best to select one of these, and then devise a method to counteract it.

Let us suppose that the pupils of a middle-school class lack ability to talk on subjects of their own choosing because they have too few ideas. Clearly, the need here is for the class to learn 'how to think round a subject', how to collect ideas, and how one can dwell on some aspect of a subject and gather ideas to it. Merely to stimulate such a class to produce ideas on one or two subjects, as is sometimes advised, will not achieve much beyond the single lesson. The method, then, should boldly confront the class with the problem: how does one gather ideas

about a subject? When the pupils' problem is the same as that of a person in real life, it is often effective to introduce a reference to an actual situation of everyday occurrence. In the lesson we have in mind this reference might come in here: 'How does a journalist enrich his writing? Does he touch on wide and popular interests and on deep human concerns, or has he, through his constant practice of writing, a wealth of ideas at his command?' By looking at their task in some such way as this, pupils see that other writers have the same problem as they have, and that local journalists, editors of school magazines, contributors to trade journals, may have had to learn how to produce leaders, articles and reports of interest and specified length. A wider application often gives a class wider interests in an investigation.

The next stage of this particular lesson will be preparation of material for speaking. One method would begin this with pupils' discussing the subject informally, suggesting ideas just as these crop up in their minds. But if most of the class decided to speak on different subjects, it might be a good plan to let each pupil prepare his talk by drafting an outline of it on paper. Another plan would be to prepare one subject fully with the help of the whole class, as an example of what can be done in collecting ideas and facts. If this is done and the ideas suggested are written on the board, time should not usually be spent on planning a more logical order, as this particular lesson is not intended to train the pupils to produce speeches with good logical order: that would call for a different method.

As the problem for the class to work at is 'how to prepare a speech or short talk', the method might concentrate on the pupils' successful gathering of ideas, and then on a study of how they achieved that success. This

would entail the teacher's questioning on some fruitful topic already suggested in the preliminary survey, and further probing along a main line of interest, which for full success would require an acquaintance with the interests and knowledge of the class. The plan might end with a short analysis of how success had been achieved, the class noting how an example or an illustration, or even an objection, could lead on to another line of thought, or open up another facet of the subject, with its own cluster of ideas. Some teachers would conclude with the pupils' summarizing the machinery for preparing a talk: with not very able pupils this would possibly be useful, and necessary.

In dealing with the enlargement or the more adroit use of vocabulary, the reference to real life situations would be one way of providing a context for new words or for a more exact grasp and use of known words. A real life situation might be in a garage, where a young mechanic says to a fellow worker: 'Listen! Timing!' He would then be fully understood; but if he had to explain to the car-owner what was wrong with the engine, he very well might need such words as 'vaporization', 'synchronizing', etc. Of course, when such words were learnt by the mechanic, they would have had an exact meaning if his experience of what they refer to had been accurate and first-hand. This is an important feature in vocabulary learning: that the new words refer to that which is 'real' experience. However, real situations to make certain the meaning of new words cannot always be arranged; an imaginary one will serve the same purpose, though, of course, not so efficiently. If the situation appears in a novel or play that the pupils have read, especially if they had enjoyed it, the meaning of new or vaguely understood words should become accurate and vivid. Literature and

drama that can grip our attention is the best academy to go to for new words and for refurbishing old ones.

So we see that in vocabulary work the teacher must plan for the words to appear in a context, if possible a lively, absorbing and vivid one; for a context will not only reveal the meaning of the word in a natural setting, but will often give fine exactness and vividness to it; and by throwing the meaning into sharp relief the context shows how the word is used. It also provides a segment of real or imagined experience for the children to keep in mind, instead of their having only an isolated word, the meaning of which floats above their comprehension without an anchorage in some lived experience, and that like a kite may fly away, for no small hand can catch hold of its untethered, tantalizing string. Words without their anchorages of real experience are airy nothings, or like straws in the wind can fill only the minds of hollow men.

The difficulty in planning methods for work in English is nearly always to discover *how* to develop a skill or ability. Many of the suggestions for overcoming this or that difficulty, offered here and elsewhere, may not be acceptable; and there is often insufficient agreement among teachers concerning methods. This is understandable, because situations in the classroom are never quite the same, and the effectiveness of a method can rarely be gauged satisfactorily. Nevertheless some success will usually be gained whenever a teacher accurately analyses the weaknesses and needs of his own pupils, and devises methods that get at the root causes of weakness, or that promote intelligent use of the ability that is needed for a better command of language.

We should note here that no formal or artificial method should be imposed on a lesson; for all procedures must be adapted to particular circumstances, and to particular

pupils. An off-the-peg method will usually be ineffective; but one designed and modelled to suit the needs of one's own pupils will always achieve something, and if that is only a small gain, those pupils will have had the valuable experience of working with a critical, consistent and thoughtful adult mind. Teaching cannot fit a preconceived, pre-ordained pattern; it must be capable of and ready for constant adaptation and alteration in the face of special needs, special problems, special difficulties—and unexpected responses!

The teacher's constructive skill in devising procedures to suit particular cases calls for fine craftsmanship; and this craftsmanship, particularly in training the abilities of his pupils and improving the quality of their responses, will draw on all his judgment and intelligence in analysis, on his sense of values and on his artistic powers of imagination and appreciation. Such demands on him will excite his best efforts, his ever renewed interest and constructive thought; and whenever he puts forth these, he cannot fail to bring about his pupils' progress. Indeed, in these days a redoubling of effort is urgently necessary as the practical situation is so pressing and is so often antagonistic to fine quality and creative work, and especially as the need to maintain standards is so vital.

Nothing so much clears a learner's way, helps him so much on in it, and makes him go so easy and so far in any inquiry, as a good method.

JOHN LOCKE: *Some Thoughts concerning Education*.

VII

SPEAKING

His hardest labour is his tongue, as if he were loath to use so deceitful an organ.

JOHN EARLE: 'A Childe' (*Microcosmographie*).

IT's the English teacher's job to make them speak better'—so runs the staff-room argument. It is, of course, the truth, but not the whole truth, for every teacher is responsible for getting clearly heard, correct and intelligible speech from his pupils, as well as for promoting exact expression of the ideas and facts of importance that come to light in the course of his teaching. Unfortunately, it is occasionally necessary for teachers of the mother tongue to point this out; nevertheless no English teacher worth his salt would refuse to make good speaking one of his chief aims.

'To make them speak better' would appear perhaps to a science teacher to be a simple undertaking; but for the teacher of English it is far from simple. He has to ask himself: 'What does it mean—to "speak better"?—"Is it volume or clarity of sound that is wanted?"—"Speak out!" the children are told, or "Speak up!"—"Is the fault in the producing of the speech sounds, when speech is muffled and mumbled with immobile lips and almost clenched teeth?"—"Or is "speaking better" mainly concerned with using expressive or correct words to clothe our ideas?"—"Perhaps good speech is largely a matter of using expressive tones, variations in pace and emphasis in order to

bring out the purpose of the speech and its feeling; or does it mean having plenty of ideas and fluency of speaking?' Any one, or more, of these may be thought to constitute the most important element in Good Speech; but improvement in speaking is not likely to be brought about unless pupils' weaknesses are correctly diagnosed, and unless each weakness is treated in a way that will have some effect on it.

There are four main factors in this work that will engage our attention: (*a*) the use of the voice as an instrument for communication in words, (*b*) the information to be communicated, (*c*) the language expressing this information, and (*d*) the speaker's personality and purpose, which control the other three. The speaker's personality may involve special problems, such as his self-consciousness, his nervousness, his speech defects; and one or more of these may have to be dealt with, if improvement in speaking is to be achieved. But as it is not possible to review all of these problems in a short space, only one will be considered here.

It is well known that a pupil's faulty use of his voice and poor breath-control may be due to shyness. Under pressure, of course, he may produce some clear speech; but general improvement is often checked by attention having been drawn to his poor speaking; almost any kind of well-meant instruction or kindly persuasion may bring about undesirable reactions, especially with older pupils, and result in no improvement in clarity, firmness of enunciation, or carrying power of the voice. The lazy method of telling a pupil to speak more distinctly is wasted effort; though the unfortunate habit of interrupting a lesson and parading a pupil's weakness by publicly commenting on his failure to speak well may still be observed in classrooms.

The problem is *how* to avoid drawing attention to pupils' manner of speaking; this could be done by setting the class to study the problem of 'What is good speech?', or to investigate how actors can make themselves heard at the back of a theatre. Or the class might be taken into the school hall for a 'Mock Public-Speaking Competition', with the majority seated at the back taking notes of the various speaker's voices and the way these are produced, in an attempt to find out how the voice can be made to carry to the back of a hall without shouting. Short reports might be produced by the pupils in small groups, and these reports could serve as material for a discussion on the subject in a next lesson. In this way a class might become interested in problems of good speech. When that is achieved, some improvement in the speaking of many in the class will often follow.

In planning methods and selecting objectives, we should keep in mind that it is the arousing of interest that makes pupils eager to improve; and that this eagerness is a guarantee of success. We ought not to flatter ourselves by thinking that it is our explicit instruction that brings about improvement. On the contrary, it is often more effective to throw the onus on the class, and to make the pupils themselves responsible for finding out what is wanted. By doing this the teacher is able to step out of his traditional rôle as the person in authority in front of a class pouring out information, and to take on the more appropriate character of director, guide and adviser. Certainly this kind of teaching makes more demands on a teacher's constructive and creative powers; but the results are correspondingly more satisfying and happy.

The voice-recording instrument is an effective aid in dealing with the poor speech of self-conscious pupils and of those whose speaking does not improve after other

methods have been tried. It is essential for these pupils to hear their own voices and to discover their own weaknesses. The class should first be given some training in detecting faults of speech, and then several pupils should speak the same passage into the instrument; these passages can then be numbered and played back to the class without anyone announcing the names of the speakers, though each pupil must be given privately the number of his speaking, as he may not recognize his own voice. Treatment of the difficulty on lines like these rarely fails to convince the most obdurate pupil. The revealing of weakness by a machine, instead of by a person, takes away the impression of a pointing finger directed at the pupil.

As a variant of this plan, several passages of everyday dialogue could be spoken by both good and poor speakers. The recordings are then played back two or three times, while the class takes notes. In the discussion that follows the pupils can have short lengths of the recordings played again to illustrate their points. A summary at the end, compiled by small groups of 'Assessors', would drive home the main findings of the class, and would impress everyone with the importance of good speech.

In work of this kind pupils should be encouraged to deal as technically as they can with the details of voice production in public speaking, play production, etc., for they should study the finer points of the technique which enables a speaker to throw the voice to the back of a hall, instead of swallowing or chewing it. This is nearly always interesting to children for they often become very well-informed on matters of technique connected with the theatre, film-production, broadcasting and ballet.

Objections might be raised that pupils' ideas and com-

ments on the techniques of voice production would appear to an expert to be very inexact and not sound enough to have good results; but these objections are not really relevant, for the purpose of this method is not to teach technicalities but to arouse interest, to stimulate pupils' thinking about problems of speech, and to divert attention from the individual. In such work as this we often have to convince our pupils first that there is a problem, and that the techniques that have been worked out by experts really do improve speaking. But even more important than this: we have to arouse the *will* to make an effort, and a desire to improve. Without this desire, and the belief that improvement is possible, no expert instruction or well-informed training can effect much, and in classes where poor speaking is accepted by all as their natural speech, it will effect nothing: to those pupils their speaking is just speech, neither good nor bad, and therefore not needing attention.

When we turn from the use of the voice as an effective instrument for communicating to the effective use of the mother tongue in various modes of communication—in narrative, description, exposition, instruction, persuasion—we shall find few difficulties, provided that manageable or provocative subjects are chosen. The young pupil in the lower or middle school will often find himself as Rousseau did: 'When forced to speak, I am at a loss for words; and if anyone looks at me, I am instantly out of countenance; but if animated with my subject, I express my thoughts with ease.'¹ This gives us our clue: whatever the mode or form of the oral work, the subject of the pupils' talks must not only be within the capacities and experience of the pupils, but must *lie close* to the heart of their special interests and dearest concerns. It is only after

¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau: *Confessions*.

they have had long practice in speaking, formally and informally, about topics they know well and enjoy talking about, that they should attempt more adult or less familiar subjects. We have to keep to our purpose in all of this work: we are not aiming at producing public speakers, parliamentary debaters or professional storytellers; we are attempting to develop our pupils' powers of expressing themselves unselfconsciously and easily.

With the less able speaker in mind, the shy pupil and those who are 'slow of study', we must make the preparation stage of the lesson longer and more thorough than would be necessary for specially intelligent children. There is no need to describe here the different ways in which short talks, interviews, descriptive sketches, explanation of processes, etc., may be prepared; but questioning will usually play a large part, and the collecting of material from books, friends, personal observation, etc., should sometimes be planned; usually it should be discussed well beforehand. A discussion, with expert questions probing the more practical suggestions, will often 'animate a subject' and arouse interest, as well as help to inform the unpractical pupil how to set about the task of collecting and preparing his material. No doubt ringing the changes of procedure is always a great help in the lower forms, and a surprise sprung at the right moment will also cause animation and increase attention, provided the petar' does not hoist the engineer!

After two terms of *prepared* oral work of various kinds, the programme for the third term might include impromptu speeches, interviews, 'suspect' interrogations, imaginary wireless talks (quizzes, autobiographical anecdotes, animal stories, etc.), 'Confessions' ('Why I like parlour games better than dancing'), and similar oral diversions and topical conversation pieces. Most of these

at first should be planned with a dramatic setting, with two or three characters taking part; for instance, a wireless talk can be a shared affair, on the lines of those that have a leader and main speakers; if the over-worked 'hobbies' talk is carried out by a group in *this* way, unexpected animation and stimulating dialogue will often liven up a class and encourage reluctant pupils.

The most problem-free oral work in many classes will always be that which is 'in character'; for the pupil who is impersonating some 'character' will forget himself in his attempt to be the other person, even though his impersonation is not at all good. Self-consciousness, shyness, lack of confidence, fear of running dry or being laughed at, then will often disappear, and speech will nearly always flow more naturally and coherently. Everyday situations are quite sufficient for the younger pupils, and conventional types to impersonate will give them ample occasion and incentive to speak; later they can develop a situation until it embraces several characters, and provide further scope for more and more varied speech. As far as training in the use of language goes, all this will be satisfactory, for though they will not be expressing their own personal thoughts and interests, the children will be using language freely and pointedly to express what they have in mind. This kind of work is also useful to lead on to informal classroom plays written by the children, and to informal dramatic expression, in which the pupils' expression of character and situation in action and speech leads to a proper appreciation of Shakespeare, and to rich and mettlesome experiences in dramatic performance.

On no occasion of their lives do men speak generally better than on the scaffold, and with the executioner at their side;

partly, indeed, because they are then most in earnest, and unsolicitous about effect; but partly, also, because the pressure of the time sharpens and condenses the faculty of abstracting the capital points at issue.

DE QUINCEY: *Letters to a Young Man.*

VIII

SILENT READING

A candidate for honours was expected to read Homer, Vergil, Demosthenes, and the speeches of Cicero. . . . The happy heart could swill and booze Homer until the world contained no Homer that he had not read. After long years on a ration of twenty drops a day nicely medicated from a master's fad bottle, I drank with open throat.

R. G. COLLINGWOOD: *An Autobiography*.

IN the teaching of reading there are so many possible objectives that a teacher cannot make a wise selection without careful consideration; he has also to concentrate on the more important of these in order to avoid dissipating his efforts. There are two objectives, however, that surpass all others in importance: exact reading and wide reading. For it is absolutely essential for every boy and girl to become an exact reader; though it would not be easy to convince anyone that every pupil should be competent in reading aloud. It is also most desirable for all pupils to form the habit of reading, for wide reading contributes so much to their general education, as well as to their welfare and progress.

Because of its importance we must never relax our efforts to develop our pupils' skill of exact silent reading; so the training has to go on from the first week in the secondary school until the end of the final year. As for the other objectives, they can receive attention at different stages in the reading course. Naturally, the method to be used in this training will not be the same throughout the school years; but will change as the pupils mature, starting

with simple procedures, and gradually through each year becoming more intensive and more searching. And the material to be read will, obviously, increase in difficulty as the pupils' skill increases and their minds develop. But children's stories and other juvenile material should be discontinued in junior classes where there are many older, though backward, pupils, in order that their wider experience and perhaps greater sophistication may have more appropriate reading matter.

As always, standards are important. In the past we have, no doubt, been too easily satisfied with pupils' approximate understanding of what they have read; and even senior pupils have assumed that they had 'read' a book when they had gone through it and knew what it was about, but had not, time and again, pondered what the author really meant, and what were the implications of the story, view of life and social background. Indeed, teachers of English in Grammar Schools should know that the reading habits and reading skills of the university undergraduates that they had had previously under their care often fall below an acceptable standard, and that university teachers are constantly finding that their students have gone through too many books without close attention to meaning, and that some of them, even those in Arts faculties, have no inkling of what exact reading entails. This criticism, we must all agree, is too disturbing to be passed over. It is likely that there is not enough training in exact reading in top forms, or that the training is not strict enough; but the remedy is not difficult. Some intensive training, even if only once a fortnight, would reveal to the senior pupils what is demanded in exact reading, and the high standard they must endeavour to reach.

At a lower level, and especially in Modern Schools, it is evident that we should try to help our pupils to become

efficient readers, if only for the reasons that school education now makes such full use of books, and that some of these are difficult for weak readers. This matter of efficient reading is too central in every child's education for it to be left to chance, or for it to be regarded as a possible achievement of only the best pupils. We must be more ambitious, and determine that every child in every school has enough training to make him an exact reader—of the reading material that best suits his age and mentality. For the reader who is trained to get exact information from books will be able to make good progress in most of the usual school subjects, and will be able to improve his general knowledge; but if his reading is slipshod, he will be hampered in many ways, and sometimes at a serious disadvantage, for he may believe he is mastering a subject, or an important topic, when he is only scraping up a smattering of it.

It is therefore the pressing responsibility of every teacher of English to make this training in exact reading his major concern. No longer can the enthusiast for literature devote most of his teaching periods to the appreciation of poetry, the beauties of Shakespeare, or (fortunately) to the prose style of Lamb, Hazlitt, Pater, George Moore. But also the teacher of history or of science can no longer leave it entirely to the teacher of English to insist on pupils' finding out exactly what is expressed in the printed word. It is now the duty of all to take a hand in this task.

Taking this matter outside school, we see that in almost every walk of life special competence in reading is necessary for efficiency—in commerce, law, politics, medicine, industry—in fact, in nearly every field of human activity the gathering of accurate knowledge from books is now not only desirable, it is essential. Furthermore, failure to note exact detail in contracts, specifications, business

letters, instructions, deeds, notices, and even bills, is a frequent cause of loss of confidence, irritating delays, unnecessary expense, and results in general inconvenience, or incompetence in carrying out the ordinary affairs of everyday life.

Too often nowadays the policies of 'muddle through' and 'We'll get by' intrude into the affairs of trade, business, workshop and sometimes even into the offices of professional men. Our pupils must be equipped to help to defeat this, as well as to earn their own living by taking up a career or fitting themselves into the efficient working of factory, office or administrative organization: a sound competence in reading is essential for these purposes. It is in the lower posts, the beginner's place, in public concerns and private undertakings that efficiency is so badly needed to-day, and is so often lacking. If the senior members of business firms, who deal with major decisions and policies, read inaccurately, they have secretaries to put them right; but it is the junior who has to deal with detail, and as so much of what he will handle is paper-work, he needs to be intellectually sharp-eyed to be able to do his work competently.

So important is the need for exactness in reading that the whole subject of training competent readers should receive special study; it could, for instance, come before members of conferences, and of committees discussing the training of teachers, and there be given well-informed scrutiny and courageous criticism. Evidence might be forthcoming that reading in schools is often undirected or too cursory, or that comprehension questions pin-pointing items at random on the page, and shot at a class without aiming, are thought to promote exactness in reading. A practical recommendation might be put forward officially that the training in exact reading should be carried out

regularly in all types of school (for instance, once a week for the first two or three years, and then once a fortnight), and that this training should become more searching, more detailed and sharply focused as the pupils become more proficient.

It is worth remembering that in much of the English work with lower forms high standards cannot be demanded, but in reading and comprehension, with patience, even the less intelligent pupils can achieve high standards, provided the book they are reading is suited to their ages and interests. Obviously there is great value in junior pupils being able to attain high standards, especially if they are pupils who regard themselves as weak in the subject; though to train junior readers to achieve high standards in gathering detail in their reading, one generally needs a sound and effective method. The first one described here has many advantages for the backward reader, as it helps him to find in the print the correct answer to almost every question.

The training we have in mind makes use of special types of questioning. The purpose of this questioning is not merely to find out if individuals have understood a passage, for this can easily be perceived directly detailed questioning begins; it is to train pupils to note the step-by-step development of the story or description, and to become bird-eye sharp in perceiving each detail just *as it is presented* by the writer. For the purpose of this method is to develop the skill of *reading*, not mental resiliency, and therefore to promote quickness in detecting not only the exact line of thought in the passage, but all the contributing details as well.

In this method the passage is first read silently, and then the class is questioned on it. The questions at first have to be extremely simple, in fact they should be almost

too obvious. If they seem to a teacher to be too easy, and perhaps even boring or useless, he will have to remind himself that they are asked like this at first in order to give the weaker pupils practice in *accurate* response from the beginning. For weak pupils' chief need is not so much instruction, as to gain some self-confidence by enjoying the experience of answering questions correctly. If a teacher gives his poor readers copious practice in this very simple work, he will soon be aware that they are achieving what at first seemed to be far above their capabilities.

The questioning that we have referred to has two stages.¹ Stage One questions keep strictly to the text, and ask simply for details that are expressed in the text; as a rule they require the answers of the poorer readers to quote the words of the text. Thus, for poor readers in the first year, Stage One questions on the sentence 'the boy was quietly fishing in the old mill pond', would be 'What was the boy doing?'—*Ans.* 'He was fishing.' 'Where was he fishing?'—*Ans.* 'In a pond.' 'What pond was it?'—*Ans.* 'The old mill pond.' Then the next sentence (or so) would be dealt with in the same way, and a paragraph or two covered, or only the more exciting incidents, and completed in five or ten minutes. Then some more silent reading, and more Stage One questions. In this method we see that, sentence by sentence, the weak readers are impelled to attend to the words, and to follow the print line by line. By having books open the whole time every pupil can keep his eyes on the print, and can answer correctly, though some answers may be incomplete at first. A very poor reader should perhaps be encouraged to follow the print with his finger.

This very simple kind of questioning enables the pupils to note exactly what is said, and to follow the train of

¹ Examples may be seen in Appendix A.

thought that makes up each paragraph. Such concentration on meaning, sentence by sentence, is exactly what most poor readers need in order to help them to understand correctly what is on the page, to keep their minds on the thought of the paragraph, and to follow its continuous development to the end. Their previous failure to improve may have been caused by breaks frequently occurring in the continuity of thought of what they were trying to read, perhaps the result of other pupils' poor reading aloud, or their own inattention. Of course, if a pupil is not following the text, or cannot understand it, his answer will immediately reveal that he has lost the place, or does not understand it, or has lost the thread of the story. This kind of questioning obviously is used for only a short time with average classes, quick pupils not needing such simple work; but with poor readers it may have to be used for a week or two. The teacher can see when this Stage One type of questioning has gone on long enough, for speed and accuracy in answering will indicate that a change is needed. It is a good plan, however, to let some of the better pupils ask the questions for a short time, before passing on to the next stage.

Stage Two questions also keep closely to the text; but these ask for information that is relevant to it, though not actually expressed in words. Thus these questions ask about the people, things and events that are mentioned or referred to in the passage, and only about these. They do not ask for any facts or ideas that are not closely related to what is in the text; for their purpose is not to arouse interests outside the narrative or argument, or to produce original ideas—questions with that purpose have their value, of course, but that is not the value we are concerned with here. The purpose of these questions is to clarify understanding and to deepen it, or to enrich with relevant

detail the 'build up' of a scene, story or theme, so that it will be imagined more fully and accurately; sometimes their purpose is to help the pupils to understand more fully the causes and reasons for the actions and thoughts of the characters in a story. In short, the questions are to help the readers to get more from the text than they would have got by keeping to the literal, surface meaning of the words. Their pedagogical purpose is to train pupils to become efficient readers.

When questioning a class, we have to keep in mind that if the training in *reading* is to be effective, our questions should not ask what the pupils think about the characters or actions in the story, or about such things as what they themselves might have done in similar circumstances, or what might happen if the events took place at the present time. Those are Stage Three questions, which we come to later; they have another purpose. But questions to improve silent reading (and reading with precise imagining) should not lead the pupils' minds *out of* the story of thought; they should promote concentration on it. The closer the focus, the *truer* will be the emotional response, if good literature is being read. These questions are to sharpen imagination, not blunt it by general, over-all questions. Thus, Stage Two questions on the sentence about the boy fishing might be: 'Why was he sitting quietly?'—'What was the pond like?'—'Why did old mills have ponds?'—'What was he fishing with?'—'What kinds of fish was he expecting to catch?'

This kind of questioning has an additional effect: it helps the weaker readers to become more interested in what they read. Obviously, this is because they see more in it, and become more aware of the undercurrent of motive, external influence, emotion, etc., and they can imagine everything more vividly because details are more

precise. When questions ask why this action was done and why that, what was the cause of this incident, and the result of that one, the more realistic and detailed imagining enables the slower ones to produce better answers. So, too, when questions ask about character, as revealed in speech and action, the readers can enter more imaginatively into the minds and thoughts of the persons in the story, and so understand them more fully: thus they enjoy their reading more, and their imaginations too are both corrected and cultivated.

The reason for keeping strictly to the text, and for limiting the pupils' interest by not admitting every possible enquiry is clear, and will no doubt gain assent by its soundness: in this work we are not developing pupils' reasoning powers, the fertility of their ideas, their originality of thought, or even mental agility with words. We are training them to be quick and accurate in finding what a writer has said, and what he intends shall be understood in that saying: this is 'reading for meaning'. This skill seems to be so badly needed in education to-day that every pupil should be given this strict training that makes use of detailed and intensive questioning. Any kind of half-hearted effort to achieve this objective must surely be deprecated, for our pupils have so short a time in school to master this skill, and the urgency cannot honestly be denied.

As a postscript to this theme of exact reading, we quote Robert Gittings on Keats's reading habits: 'He read with an intensity that can hardly be imagined . . . he went through every word of a book, annotating, underlining, and marking nearly every page from cover to cover, absorbing every phrase, cadence and intonation of the author. . . . What might be a pastime with other men was a passion with him.'

JOHN KEATS: *The Living Year*.

IX

READING FOR INFORMATION, AND READING AND THINKING

Ideas cannot be too much prized in and for themselves, cannot be too much lived with.

MATTHEW ARNOLD: *The Function of Criticism.*

WE must now consider a somewhat similar reading skill: reading to find particular information. The information we want may be a long sought-for answer to some question, the solution to some problem, the evidence for some theory, an illustration of some theme, the supporting facts of some proposal. To find such information in a book, in a chapter or in a page, is not always easy, and the skill of reading with careful comprehension will not help us very much, if at all. Indeed, many of us will remember the wearisome search that we have made at one time or another for some fact or special information; often when we could ill afford the time. Such a search, often fruitless to an untrained reader, is disheartening; and most of our pupils need to be trained to find information in print, for they rarely have the natural skill to be able to do this. Our task is to train them to get quickly on the scent of the information they need by rapidly reading a page or so, and to follow the trail closely, perhaps through several pages, until they come on their quarry. Most pupils have to be taught how to skim through print, noting its general purport, but not holding every idea in mind clearly. As this kind of reading is so different from the reading that attempts to master the

complete thought of a passage, a short series of lessons giving practice in reading to develop this skill should be planned in the third or fourth years of the reading course.

A method for this purpose may be briefly described: first the pupils read silently, and, as they read, look for answers to the four or five questions that have been written on the board. The answers then are given orally or written down, and assessed and discussed. The questions can easily be suited in difficulty to the intelligence of the class; and when the method is used in consecutive lessons, small variations can be made with advantage. For instance, in a second lesson the questions might require a composite answer, perhaps made up of facts or ideas from several paragraphs; after a week or so, the questions could be graded steeply in difficulty; though for poor classes it would be best to set double the number of easy questions. In later lessons the passage to be read through should be lengthened, and the answers less easy to find; sometimes they might occur in the final paragraph or in the last lines. With good classes the questions should be difficult and usually well scattered over the passage, so that readers would have to search through several pages to find their answers within a set time limit.

It is quite easy to vary this work, and to keep pupils eager to find possible clues and to follow these up. When they become proficient, the work can be adapted to help the class to gather material for compositions, or for form magazines, debates, etc. Some classes need help in gathering material for their oral and written work, and most would carry this out more competently if they had focused instruction and concrete examples to work on; nearly all pupils, too, require advice and instruction on how to take notes of the facts they are collecting—a skill of real value to many people. With less bookish pupils, reading for

information could be linked with a practical activity, such as mastering instructions which they carry out, or describe if action is not possible: the competence of the reading then has a practical test, which might convince the argumentative ones of a weakness.

The efforts of a class will be still further stimulated, if, after a number of lessons, the teacher hands over the selection of the questions to some of the quicker pupils. When this is tried, the effort that the pupils put forth may surprise those who know them; and it is a good way of engaging the activity of those who get through their work much quicker than their fellows. It will also be noticed that they soon produce questions that are more difficult than any teacher would normally ask. Searching for difficult questions to catch the others makes them extra careful in their reading of the text.

Reading and Thinking

But alas! To swing by hooks passed through the back, or to walk on shoes with nails of iron pointed upward on the soles, all this is so much less difficult, demands so very inferior an exertion of the will than to think, and by thought to gain knowledge and tranquillity.

S. T. COLERIDGE: *The Friend*.

The special value of reading material that is of absorbing interest (at any level) is that it accustoms the mind to follow continuous lines of thought. The formation of this habit is essential for the improvement of our thinking. But one implication is that 'Comics' that have no close continuity of thought (but only hop from one picture to the next) have no power to improve reading, for they do not promote the habit of attending to continuous expression. It is evident that the focus of attention, and therefore

the mental stream, of very many children, even at the secondary stage of education, is constantly being distracted and diverted from one thing to another throughout their waking hours, so that there is usually little chance of the habit of continuous thought being formed. This focus of attention, we may be sure, will be held to a connected line of thought only if there is strong interest in what is being read; and for most classes sufficient interest will be aroused only by stories. Narrative therefore is the right material for nearly all the younger children, and also for those older ones whose reading and thinking are perfunctory.

On the other hand, we have to beware of promoting the kind of reading that Dimnet refers to in his *Art of Thinking* as 'nothing else than a method for not thinking'; but reading will be an escape from thinking only when the material read demands no effort, or when the reading is not reading but idle skimming. If the narrative has sufficient interest for a young reader, as he reads he will be making an effort of imagination and of continuous thought. He may not be aware of any effort of concentration; but his effort will be sustained by his enjoyment and by his desire to know 'what happens next?' His enjoyment at this stage of his mental growth is a valuable element: we must not pedantically deride it or underestimate its importance.

The quality of his thinking and imagining, naturally, will depend on the quality of the books he reads; but as he passes from the simple stories of childhood, through the young schoolboy stage of adventure and weird fantasy, to the popular novel of to-day and yesterday, and finally to the classics, the quality of the thought and imagining in his mental stream will slowly improve. Valuable as all this reading experience is as part of his training and

mental exercise, yet it does not provide scope and impetus for the development of *initiative* in thinking and for independence of mind, or for the promotion of individual qualities of thought and personal modes of thinking. Home, therefore, may be the right place for his silent reading of narrative, and school for the fostering of initiative, independence and individuality of mind. But *how* are these qualities to be promoted and sustained?

We have dealt with the questioning that keeps strictly to the text. We now come to Stage Three questioning, which also starts from the text, but uses it only as a spring-board, to get impetus from it. These questions ask for anything that arises *from* what is referred to in the text. For instance, in reading Jane Austen's novels, the pupils may be led, through these questions, to think of the slow tempo of life, as she depicts it, and the length of time spent in carriages and on journeys; the class then could be asked to compare that tempo with the pace of the life quickened up in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and to suggest reasons for the difference. Or the class might compare the independence of the modern woman and her freedom from restraint with the earlier social restrictions; and account for the changes.

The mind in small diversions from a text is stimulated in a simple and easy way to follow individual lines of enquiry, and to make use of comparisons, personal experience and interests and knowledge, and also to make deductions, form conclusions, or to raise further questions. As a contrast to Stage Two questions, each of which often has one correct answer, these expect each mind to follow its own bent and to produce its own answer. The text is the stimulus to initiative and independence in thinking; yet not to free-for-all, unbridled thought, for each fresh

train of thought starts off from a definite detail in the story or argument, known to all.

Not only does this kind of training perform a useful service in educating the mental powers of the pupils; it also enriches—or corrects—responses to the text; for instance, in reading *Sense and Sensibility*, we feel the significance of Marianne's being taken over the Allenhams mansion and estate by Willoughby more deeply when we are aware of the conventions of the day that governed the conduct of young ladies.

We turn to the classics of English literature, not at the moment to promote our pupils' appreciation of them, but because they are the best material for developing independence of mind. Readings in history, science, geography, etc., do not usually provide anything like the stimulus provided by the classics; though when the teaching of those subjects is superlatively good, the pupils would of course find those readings with questions on them equally stimulating.

In class discussion intended to promote independent thinking, we should at first accept rash opinion, half-formed idea, wayward suggestion; and with some pupils, the ones with bone-idle minds, even encourage these in order to get wheels turning; but with regular practice, once a fortnight perhaps, we might eventually expect logical deductions, ideas of fresh significance, and perhaps judgments supported by fact or other evidence. It is best to inform the class of the purpose of this work, and to encourage note-taking during the reading. At first, questions might range widely over a diversity of topics; but later the speakers should be kept to logical trains of thought and to relevant associations; though if questions fail to produce thoughtful answers, a lower standard has to be accepted.

It will be argued, and justifiably, that one cannot develop initiative and independence of thinking very far, except with outstanding classes, especially when the training in exact reading must take up so much time. This may be admitted; but the disciplinary side of reading, covered mainly by exact reading and comprehension exercises, though it will take up most of the time allotted to reading, should often leave part of a lesson for developing the abilities to reason, to reflect, and even to speculate, as well as other forms of thinking. The disciplinary side must be intensive, even with poor readers; and therefore half-an-hour will be long enough for most classes, for it is exacting work: the remaining ten minutes or so could then be given to the questioning that is designed to stimulate the pupils to produce ideas of their own that arise from the passage read. The change to questions ranging widely over the field cuts down the time for the focused questions, so these have to be more intensive in order to cover the ground, but it varies the lesson and opens up fresh interests.

Besides being a stimulus to thinking, the reading that is followed by questions on associated topics may have two useful by-products. The first was emphasized by Dimnet in: 'Thoughts which occur to you as you read, are your own, they are no mere reflection of what I (as writer) am saying, and that is the chief reason for which you enjoy them as they rise from behind my sentences.' These thoughts that are 'no mere reflections' of the writer's are those which Stage Three questions seek to stimulate. Perhaps most pupils in school to-day need such questioning before they can produce thoughts that will arise behind the sentences they read; but the reading, supplemented by stimulating questions, that will cause thought to rise will also be favourable to the growth of mind and person-

ality, even of the slowest pupils: the necessity and the value of this reading and these questions therefore can hardly be over-estimated.

The second by-product is also important: when we meditate on what a writer has expressed, his thought, if significant, sinks deeper into consciousness and so nourishes thinking, especially our original and creative thinking. For improvement, thinking requires nourishment just as much as practice and training, and it needs the salutary contact with a stringent adult mind if a fine edge is to be put on it, for 'Pithie questions are mindes whetstones'.¹ We see, therefore, how valuable in education is this private meditation and individual thinking. The personal testimony of Whitehead will support this: 'I read very slowly. . . . As a matter of fact, I have not read a great quantity of books; but I think about what I read, and it sticks.'² If only more would 'stick' in our pupils' minds! But then do we use this plan, or any other one, of helping pupils to ruminate on what they read? Perhaps we do not feel strongly enough that those whose minds are poorly stocked, and those who never have much to say when called upon to speak or write, should read and read, and should be inspired to ponder what they read. Would it not also be advisable for our pupils to know this, and to receive guidance in learning how to think intently about what they read?

Reading furnishes the mind only with materials of knowledge, it is thinking makes what we read ours.

JOHN LOCKE: *On the Conduct of the Understanding*.

¹ Robert Greene: *Menaphon*.

² *The Dialogues of Alfred North Whitehead*.

X

READING ALOUD

To make his English swete upon his tonge

GEOFFREY CHAUCER: *The Canterbury Tales*

READING aloud is an accomplishment that few of our pupils will need after leaving school, yet it is useful for training girls and boys to speak well, and to respond perceptively to the sounds and rhythms of literature. We ought, however, to regard the training in reading aloud as quite different from the training in silent reading.

The reason for keeping these two separate is that silent reading requires the reader only to understand and imagine; but reading aloud requires, in addition to understanding and imagining, the re-expression of what is understood and imagined in another medium, in the sounds of the reader's voice. The reader aloud cannot hear the writer's voice, communicating his meaning with expressive tones and compelling rhythms; he can only see black marks on a white page. He has therefore to change the *form* of the expression from black marks to sounds, tones and rhythms—of his own voice: it is a *trans-forming*! So he has to control and make intelligent use of tone, volume, rhythm, stress, with subtlety and suppleness in order to express what he finds in the print. All this is well-known, of course; but the analysis may help us to perceive how complex the process is, and to realize that in reading aloud the pupil is not using his voice as he

habitually does, to express his own thoughts, wishes, feelings: he is doing something different; he is expressing the thoughts, wishes, feelings of the writer, or of the characters in a story or play. In teaching him, therefore, we should not forget that what he is doing, in reading aloud, is complex, is something he is unaccustomed to do, and that it demands of him a special skill.

In teaching him, too, we should be aware that in his everyday life he will usually be quite ignorant of the changes that he makes continually in his voice whenever he speaks, for he will be conscious only of the meaning and his intention that he wishes to express, and not of the subtle variations that he intuitively makes in expressing that meaning and intention. In fact, perhaps no untrained person could perceive accurately the constant variations and subtleties of his own speaking voice. On account of these reasons, special methods have to be planned to teach this skill of reading aloud; though a certain number of children who have had much silent reading experience and are naturally expressive persons, or who have been read to copiously from an early age, can read aloud extremely well. For all the others, the ordinary lesson, planned on traditional lines, and consisting of 'reading round', will not usually bring about any increase of skill.

There seems to be still a good deal of loose-reined thinking about the teaching of reading aloud. The result in the lessons themselves is often a lack of tension and direction: they saunter along without making any ground. Anyone who has listened to many such lessons will be convinced that the teacher who truly wants his pupils to learn to read aloud clearly and intelligently must take up the task with clear aim and a good deal of determination. If he believes in high standards, he is even more likely to

be successful; and if his pupils have a definite end in sight and some not-too-easy obstacles to surmount, their courage and will-to-succeed will be stimulated and strengthened.

But experienced teachers know that it is of no avail to think hopefully that their pupils will master this rather special skill unless a direct attack is made on the problem. Indeed, it should have become a commonplace that it is a waste of time to let pupil after pupil stand up and read a few sentences aloud, with the rest of the class following in their books—and therefore not *needing* the passage to be read aloud! Obviously, no pupil could ever learn to read better by going through the motions in that way. Everyone must agree that much more is required, especially when we remember how few people read aloud so well that it is a delight to listen to them.

The first thing that is required, as always in planning an attack on a problem, is to formulate clearly what one should concentrate on, and what the eventual aim is: for instance, the lessons might deal in turn with (*a*) clear enunciation, (*b*) fluency, (*c*) voice projection, (*d*) expressiveness. Choosing one of these, let us imagine the lesson in which the teacher's purpose is to improve the enunciation of rather slow or backward pupils in their second or third year.

He might begin the lesson by reading a short passage aloud to the class, slightly exaggerating the firmness and sharpness of his consonants, and then read the passage again with slack consonants, as if by a careless reader. The class could then discuss the difference between the two readings, and try to discover causes of the difference. The passage might then be read by individual pupils in imitation of the teacher's first reading, though it will be found that slow pupils very rarely overdo their enunciation of consonants, and if they try to, they often achieve a clear

pronunciation. This lesson should perhaps end with a discussion on the pupils' readings, on their audibility, clarity, and the natural ease of reading with firm consonants.

In lessons in which there is to be some reading aloud it is nearly always best for the readers to stand *at the back* of the class, and for the rest of the pupils to concentrate on listening. They can then assess the quality of the reading better, and decide more justly whether it was clear enough for all to follow easily. The books of all the listeners, of course, will be shut. This must not be forgotten, for with most classes it is strikingly effective. If books are open, there is no need for a reader to read clearly, and he feels no necessity to communicate anything, to inform or entertain. Furthermore, as all the other children are attending to the sentences with eyes and minds intent on understanding, they often do not notice poor expression or weak enunciation. Being fully engaged with understanding, most of them will not even *hear* weakness in reading, so that their criticisms and assessments of the reading may be uncertain or insincere.

It is a simple but useful piece of technique to have books shut when reading aloud is to be improved, for when a reader knows that all the other books are shut, he is aware that the onus is on him to make his audience hear and understand: this knowledge exerts more pressure on him to read well than almost anything else could; it is better than instruction, competition or self-display. In addition, the teacher is freed from the necessity to urge or persuade, and his efforts can therefore be spent more profitably in diagnosing weakness, and in planning treatment. In this kind of lesson a teacher especially needs to be free in order to concentrate his attention on technical points of voice production, such as control of breath, forward projection

of the voice, resonance; because these are not easy to deal with, and some weaknesses are difficult to detect. Diagnosis and treatment, too, must be sound, or weak pupils become muddled, and fail to make progress.

A teacher who had diagnosed lack of expressiveness in the oral reading of his second or third year pupils would, no doubt, first look for the cause of this flat, monotone reading. The cause might be a misunderstanding of the purpose of the passages read or the 'tone', or it might be feeble and careless imagining, or, more likely, inability to manage the voice as an expressive instrument. If the chief cause were misunderstanding, a new lesson might begin with a silent reading of a passage. After that, the teacher might ask detailed questions about the people and events described; though not to find out the quality of his pupils' comprehension. His questions should be aimed at making understanding more exact: they would therefore be more stimulating than those often used in testing comprehension. The questions should not deal only with fact and simple deductions of fact, but should liven up and sharpen imagination as well; for exact imagining is necessary for a proper understanding of literature, and indeed of most of what we read. This first half of the lesson is important, because the readers will not be able to bring out the meaning 'with expression' unless they know that meaning fully, and unless they can imagine the characters of the speakers in dialogue. They need to know also the purpose of the writer, else how would young readers avoid reading passages from *A Journal of the Plague Year* and from *Robinson Crusoe* in exactly the same way?

In the last half of the lesson, the pupils might discuss *how* the passage should be read, giving reasons for their suggestions, and perhaps short examples. This would help them to see what they must do with their voices in order

to read expressively. The passage then having been read by several pupils, the class might decide who expressed the meaning fully and accurately. But when there is disagreement about meaning or 'tone', as there will be sometimes, the passage might be read again in different ways, and the best interpretation, or possible interpretations, agreed upon. This testing of different opinions about a writer's intention might impress on the class the necessity for discovering precise meaning and 'tone', and also teach them that there is sometimes the possibility of two or more interpretations being correct, which is the right way for them to learn not to be hasty in judgment, or self-opinionated.

There are two points to note here. The first has been mentioned, but might be elaborated further: if pupils are to read with easy fluency and appropriate expression, they must understand more of the passage than its obvious factual meaning. They must understand, for instance, the exact purpose of the writing: is it to persuade, to instruct, to entertain, to reveal something in a conversation, or for some other purpose? Questions therefore after the silent reading are necessary for most pupils, especially for those who have difficulty in finding out a writer's true intention. Many pupils, too, often need help in discovering what were the feelings of the characters in a story: for good reading aloud, these feelings may have to be noted explicitly; whereas in an appreciation lesson, that would often be unnecessary, and usually unsound. The purpose of the first half of the lesson is to help the pupils to think in the way the writer thought: to think *with* him. We have to try to help them to feel the urgency of his arguments and the force of his reasoning, or in another kind of writing to see in their mind's eye what he imagined, as far as they are able. Then, and only then, will they be able to read

with the tones, emphasis and rhythms that can fully express what the writing demands.

The second point may seem too simple, but in practice will be found necessary with some classes: the readers should know what is meant by 'expressive reading'; for merely to tell them to 'read with expression' is ineffective, and to a dull reader is usually a meaningless command. It is necessary for most children to discover that one passage should be read with slow seriousness, but another lightly and gaily; and they should be aware of the reasons for the difference. They need to discover, for instance, that one passage calls for emphasis and energy, because strong feelings are expressed; but that a dry, plain reading will best bring out the logical reasoning of another. They should know, too, that they must find out something about the speakers in a dialogue, and how such persons would speak. Though these points are common knowledge, they are not always dealt with fully enough in class to be a help to poor readers, and they are not always dealt with *before* the reading. Also, the traditional method of teaching oral reading takes little or no notice of these points; and an ambitious teacher, anxious to get on to comprehension and then to criticism, may scamp them.

As with 'Short Talks' on the oral English programme, so with 'Reading Aloud', it is very effective to have the reading carried out in the school hall. With the class at the back, or with a class of young children half-way, the benefit of distance and space enables the listeners to judge more easily and accurately what is not clearly audible, and what can be enjoyed without strained listening because it is read expressively. In addition, as we have said earlier, the need to make himself heard and understood forces the reader to try hard. He tries because he *wants* to communicate something: his will and determination are

engaged because he feels the responsibility is his—that is a powerful incitement to do better, and a healthy stimulus to his confidence.

Of course, if a school staff is *really* determined to produce good readers, it will be done, and done perhaps within a year or so. It may be done by building up the prestige of reading aloud. The co-operation of the majority of the staff will be required, and especially the strong support of the head, for what the head patently supports will always succeed, and what he is indifferent to will have to struggle hard for a place in the life of a school, though not every head seems to be aware of this. A useful first step is to draw up a general plan and have it discussed in detail by all concerned. Some of the items in this plan might be: Reading Contests for each level throughout the school; Speech Festivals (perhaps every term); Inter-School Tournaments and Debates; Dramatic Competitions. Another part of the plan might deal with the promotion of two or three play-producing societies, play-readings perhaps several times a term (for selection of casts and for entertainment). Another item might be the daily reading of the scriptures (and other serious works) by senior pupils at the morning assembly. One of the English staff could then give the readers each week some coaching, which they would usually accept eagerly. As a high standard in reading should be reached, his expert tuition is needed. If the seniors could be given full responsibility for this ceremony, it would be raised in importance in the eyes of the school, and this would inspire senior pupils to regard the acquiring of the skill of reading aloud a worthwhile and interesting duty.

But if you mouth it, as many of our players do, I had as lief the town-crier spoke my lines.

XI

IS LITERATURE SO IMPORTANT?

I pored over The Odyssey as over a story-book, hoping and fearing for the hero whom yet I partly scorned. But The Iliad—line by line, I clasped it to my brain with reverence as well as with love.

ALEXANDER WILLIAM KINGLAKE: *Eothen*.

WE must not leave this subject of 'reading' without considering some of the wider issues that give importance to the work of training every boy and girl to become attentive and eager readers—readers who will find delight and a deep assurance of the goodness of human nature in the great literature they read. Those who have not taught in countries where there is a 'hunger for learning' amongst old and young can hardly realize how strong this yearning for knowledge can be. And those who live a full life of learning, salty-humoured discourse and fine aesthetic experience may not believe how starved the imagination of children, and of many older people too, can be, and how blindly these may crave for something beyond their immediate material existence, and for something worthy to strive for that is better than the everyday routine of their lives in town, village or country.

The purpose of the intensive and the provocative questioning that we have advocated, beyond the immediate one of training our pupils to be competent readers, is to lead them to take special interest in the characters of a novel or play, taking them out of their ordinary lives and steeping their minds and imaginations in the lives and concerns of these characters. For, when the novel or play

is 'good literature', their reading will feed and strengthen their imagination, and will engage their feelings in finer experience than they would ever take part in, except on a rare occasion. With 'good literature', the 'escape' is from the ordinary to something finer, deeper, to a life in which we understand all: this fortifies and sustains us to bear with and triumph over the ordinary, the dull and the tiresome in life.

In reading great literature (and if we are immature in reading, less-great literature) we become interested in the characters of a novel or play as if they were real persons, and when we get absorbed in it, we think their thoughts in the way they think them, and we feel as they do. We imagine that we are taking part in the events and the social affairs of the story, and that we are participating in another life, perhaps intimately as part of another family. Thus we become involved in the difficulties of other people, in incidents with their friends and acquaintances; and we feel the kindness of their well-wishers and the antagonism of others. We take sides, we judge this action and that, condemn or praise, though of course rarely explicitly.

It is through this realistic imagining and disinterested feeling that we may attain to a truer appreciation of human nature, and to a deeper understanding of life. We perceive and understand the ideals that move people to fine action, and the evil intentions and thoughts of the ill-disposed. In this way we begin, while we are young, to understand human beings more deeply than otherwise we could, and we become aware of the puzzling complexity of human nature and of human affairs. The identification with characters in novels and plays enables the reader to live all this subjectively as if it were his own real life.

On the other hand, our sense of reality and our critical

powers of analysis enable us to view these imagined experiences objectively; with the result that, though we have been partisan both in feeling and judgment, we can see these experiences in their true proportions, and we can also judge the literary work as a work of art, as a human document, and as a work of educational value. Deep meditation helps us to appreciate its quality as a work of art and its value to boys and girls at school, for literature quickens our sense of values. This is of great importance, for literacy without a sense of values is a dead-end both for individuals and for nations.

There is another aspect of the importance of good literature for school children that is sometimes overlooked, perhaps because it does not seem to be the concern especially of the teacher of English, or because there is the suggestion that one could use literature as an opportunity for pointing a moral. When we think of all that literature has to offer, we must realize its special importance for boys and girls who will go straight from school into the world of trade, commerce, business, or factory life, without any inkling of the problems and difficulties arising from the presence of many human beings of different outlook, character, abilities and responsibilities. These immature youths, having little realization of the variety of human beings that they will meet with, and must get along with amicably, have no experience of the adaptations and tolerances that must be made: where to give and where to stand firm.

Also school children often have no notion of the depths of meanness and self-seeking that human beings are prone to, or of the inclination of some people to *prey* on others—on their attention, time, work and mind. On the other hand, they need some insight into the fineness and generosity that may be met with, even on the part of the

humblest in appearance and endowment. For the life of most of our pupils is too limited for them to know enough about life, or to understand sympathetically enough its many problems and difficulties; and when they are disturbed by uncertainty and distrust, and run off the rails, having no secure hold on themselves and the life around them, how are they to know that the fault is not theirs solely, but that the shadows of fear, faithlessness and insecurity darken our age, and often obscure the finer values of life?

But in great literature, as in drama, the world is to be seen as in a mirror 'to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of the time his form and pressure.' It is there for us to look on—good, and bad, and evil at its most vicious. We are shown there that the choice is ours, and that we are each of us personally responsible for our own lives and conduct, and in part for those around us. We see there, too, that though the scales may be weighted against us, yet 'man's unconquerable mind' is able to stand up to the cruellest blows of 'Fate, Chance . . . and desperate men'. There in great literature is the eminently true revelation of the essential elements of life that are common to all of us; but which is not to be found in mediocre novels, or in second-rate reading matter, at least not convincingly.

In great literature human virtues are to be seen powerfully imbuing life with their grandeur; there we see men and women in adverse circumstances, struggling against these with determination and courage, even though tragedy end it all. And this is the spectacle that our pupils *should* see, and should be moved by: a spectacle that will strengthen them in determination, hope and courage. For trials, troubles and difficulties will inevitably come to most of our pupils, sooner or later, and their faith and

their will need to be fortified against that time. Great literature is the common treasure of all mankind, and the heritage of the generation that sits in rows in front of us in our classrooms: it is also their need.

Such characters as Hamlet, Falstaff, Lady Macbeth, Justice Shallow, Sir Toby, Henry V, inhabit the minds of millions of those who speak their language: they are part of our mental world, none more potent or living, and help to bind us together.

A. L. ROWSE: *The England of Elizabeth.*

XII

WRITING

By a long habit of writing he acquires a justness of thinking, and a mastery of manner, which holiday writers, even with ten times his genius, may vainly attempt to equal.

OLIVER GOLDSMITH: *The Citizen of the World.*

‘**H**ow can I help my pupils to write well?’ is one of the most urgent and worrying questions that a teacher of the mother tongue can ask himself; but it is a question with many answers, most of them dependent on a particular class of pupils. It is difficult to improve the writing of boys and girls at school, and puzzling to know what methods to use; though there are few stumbling-blocks in teaching composition on traditional lines, or with the use of one of the ‘Easy-Ways-to-English’ text-books. This problem is so important that every teacher of a mother tongue should make a special study of it. In doing this, if he were to formulate his ideas and theories about it carefully, he would perceive its essential elements more clearly; but he would gain still more in insight if he were to criticize those ideas and theories unrelentingly. For tradition weighs down heavily on education, and memories of our own school-days urge us ‘to do as we were done by’; therefore to achieve success in helping children to write well, a teacher must not lean too heavily on the crutches of custom, remembering that it is not given to everyone to escape easily from the indiscriminating momentum of the past. Ideally he must find his own solution, even if only a tentative one, to each new problem that each new class will present to him.

There is, of course, no one way to bring about improvement in the written work of a particular class, so more than one line of attack should be developed. These different lines should have different aims, and should develop different kinds of writing; but whatever methods are employed, one thing a class must have, and that is plenty of practice in writing continuous passages of three or more paragraphs. For children will never learn to write well unless they write frequently: they will learn to write only by writing! This is an obvious, but unfortunately a necessary reminder, for not every teacher can stop himself talking to a class about the necessity for avoiding mistakes, or can give up his talks about how to write well.

Writing one's mother tongue is very largely a skill, and a skill can be improved only by constant practice. Learning to write well is rather like learning a musical instrument; language, of course, is a musical instrument (though not always musical), and to learn to play it, one must keep on *trying* to play it, not listen to talk on the theory of music. There is no way of side-stepping this stubborn fact: one must begin to write early and one must make a habit of writing regularly.

The force of this is soon brought home to us when we reflect that we learn to write well by constantly trying to put our ideas and thoughts into words, and by being frequently faced with small problems of expression. Whenever we find correct answers to such everyday questions as 'Now what do I really mean by that?'—'What do I think about this?'—'What word will exactly express this shade of meaning?' we are solving small problems of expression. Indeed, it is the teacher's task to see that his pupils *are* frequently confronted by small problems of thinking and expression. If everyone on a school staff were enthusiastic about this, the pupils would soon make

progress in the craft of writing, and many of them would become competent writers.

A plan for several years' work might be as summed up earlier: 'a training in handling language in various ways and for various purposes'. In such a course, the pupils would be faced with such problems as: what language would you use to persuade a friend, or to explain to a junior, or to report to a senior; and how would you compose a straightforward request to a business firm, an attractive proposal to a possible sailing companion, or a letter of condolence to a sick friend who will miss his camping holiday?

What else is necessary, besides frequent practice, to bring about improvement in pupils' writing? The second essential is to select for each piece of continuous writing a limited and precisely formulated task for them to attack. For instance, a Form Two or Three might describe a street on the morning of the first snow-fall. In such a task it is the definiteness of the subject that is important; for the more precisely a scene is described, or a topic explained, the better nearly always is the writing. And our aim is to provide practice in producing *good* writing, not merely to give practice in writing. So at first, the title 'A Morning Snow Scene in Street or Country Lane' would be better than 'Winter in Town or Country', which is too vague. But if the quality of the subject were mentioned, that would be better still: for instance 'A Quiet . . .' or 'A Sunny . . .' or 'A Stormy Snow Scene in . . .'. This gives the writers an even more definite task in expression, and one in which they can all see what they have to try to do—that is most helpful, especially to the weaker ones. Those who have caught the selected quality in their writing are the successful ones; the others perhaps might be set to find out how success has been achieved in some

of the descriptions, and to try again. The younger pupils enjoy the challenge of having to try to get some specific flavour in their writing, and the definiteness of this task very often helps to bring about success, or partial success; and if the weaker ones can be cajoled into trying again, they will gain great satisfaction when they see a second attempt is much better than the first.

The third essential for success in teaching children to write well is thorough oral preparation before writing begins. The purpose of this preparation is to ensure that every pupil has not only something to say, but that ideas and language are running freely in his head. Many boys and some girls stumble along when they try to write because ideas are trickling too slowly through the lock-gates of consciousness; for the unwonted exercise of producing ideas on an unfamiliar subject, the laboured manipulation of the pen, and the lack of any urgency of purpose to write prevent the flood-gates of the mind from opening and allowing ideas to flow. So in this preparation it is necessary to stir interest in order to get minds working and individuals thinking, as well as to collect suggestions for ways of handling the subject, and to have as many as possible of the pupils' ideas discussed, examined critically, and generally turned inside out and looked at from many angles.

Some teachers show great skill in stimulating a discussion: once they have started it off, perhaps by some challenging or revealing questions, they sit quietly watching for the moment to throw in another question in order to keep the ball rolling, or to drop a remark or a critical comment that will lead the class off in a more fruitful direction. It would be advisable to encourage pupils, especially the pen-biters and head-scratchers, to take notes during the discussion, and for the teacher to keep an eye

on the development of the subject, getting the main headings written up on the board by the more active pupils (in order to save time). Perhaps further discussion on the order and arrangement of the main points should end that part of the work.

It will be necessary with some classes for a teacher to push the discussion along, perhaps by copious questions, by calling for criticisms or disagreements, or by leading the discussion towards aspects of the subject that have not been mentioned. With slow classes, during discussion, it is a good plan to have a number of pupils compiling headings, notes, facts, illustrations, and even vocabulary on the blackboards, according to the needs of the class. After about twenty minutes or less, most of the ground covered by the title should have been worked over, and the expression of many ideas practised, or listened to by less active minds. The quicker intellects will have been stimulated, we hope, sufficiently to include more in their compositions than was discussed; and the slower ones will usually have noted enough for them to produce a reasonable piece of writing; even the minds that at first were quite empty of ideas may have gathered some from the discussion. But in spite of the weight given here to the co-operative collecting and sharing of ideas, one must constantly encourage individuals to follow their own interests, experience and ideas.

Thus, in this oral preparation, ideas to express and the language to express them are run over, tried out, and rehearsed. With classes that write slowly and laboriously, or that have some ideas but only bald, trite language to express them, this oral preparation must not be curtailed, for with such classes it is essential to have the language that they may use thoroughly *practised*, so that it is flowing vigorously in their minds before the writing is undertaken.

It might be especially helpful to those who very rarely write at all to be constantly faced with such questions as 'How would you put this idea?'—'How can we emphasize this point?'—'How shall we bring out the importance of this fact?'

This is the kind of help that is needed by those who write with difficulty, and who have no linguistic ability. This step in the lesson, when carried out by a teacher who is intent on getting ideas out of a class, and who is quick in following up fruitful suggestions and in promoting oral expression, will produce better writing than almost anything else can. It is a very simple way of helping children to write, though with a large class it requires an intellectually quick mind, and with all classes a special interest in children's ideas and experiences, and especially in their stumbling efforts to express themselves.

After writing has begun, those whose minds run dry all too soon will need some individual attention; but not to be told what to say, for that would be merely a temporary palliative. Questions on what they have written often help them to see where their ideas are thin, and how these can be developed, or where their expression is weak, and how it might be more exact and definite. Questions help a passive mind to see farther into a subject, and what other ideas are related to those expressed; questions can train pupils to develop their own thoughts, and to follow those through to a conclusion, or perhaps to some other aspect of the subject. Therefore a teacher should go round a weak class, swiftly from pupil to pupil, with provocative questions prodding minds and memories. When this individual attention is given, week after week, the slow-witted ones and the slow-starters receive the training they need in order to think for themselves and to be able to produce ideas. It is this simple, timely and individual help that

the weakest pupils *must* have if they are to begin to write better. But very intelligent children like to be left alone when they are writing.

Though the purpose of the work we have been describing is to practise our pupils in the expression of their ideas, and to give them experience of handling a variety of topics and a variety of forms of written communication, for the moment we are not aiming specifically at *correct* writing. Nevertheless, we cannot totally neglect correctness, for if we do, our pupils may begin to write carelessly, and so will never master the habit of attending to the correctness of their writing; but the drive for correctness should not dominate methods during the first few years of the English course. It is true that many heads of schools, other educationists, and even many teachers, hold the view that every piece of writing should be fully corrected, and that correct writing should be insisted on from the first year onwards. But they may have forgotten that 'insistence' is a poor teacher, especially for certain types of pupil, and that 'the best is the enemy of the good'. Maybe also they are not aware of the practical problem in very many schools, where for the majority of the pupils the need is to learn *to write* rather than to learn to write correctly.

We should realize, too, that experience in a Public School, or with only the top forms in Grammar Schools, does not help one very much to understand the problems of teaching very large classes, or of teaching classes of pupils with poor language abilities—difficult problems that many teachers are now handling, if not with equanimity, at least with courage and determination. One forgets that, for the pupils in the first years of secondary education, insistence on correctness in writing is like teaching the figure of eight to a child who cannot move forward on

his skates; and that the effect of insisting on correctness too early is that the necessary niggling and nagging at young pupils' slips and mistakes of language fixes their minds on the bits and pieces of their mother tongue, when these young pupils should be learning to think clearly and to find unhesitatingly the words they need to express themselves intelligently.

Those who insist on a hundred per cent. correction perhaps do not realize that if school children are to learn to write reasonably well, the need for frequent practice is far greater than the need to have all their writings corrected. We know, too, that most people achieve correctness gradually; just as clarity, good arrangement and other qualities of good writing are achieved gradually—when they *are* achieved! The argument is that if correctness is not demanded from the beginning, pupils get into bad habits. This is, of course, true; but to prevent bad writing habits from forming is not difficult, whereas it is not at all easy to increase pupils' skill in producing clear and well-connected writing.

Clearly, then, it must be some time after the children have begun to write, and when some facility has been gained, that correctness can gradually be inculcated, and increasingly insisted on. For instance, when finished, compositions may be partly corrected, for there is little profit in correcting all of them conscientiously, except to diagnose the kind of mistake that each individual is prone to; though they should all receive some attention. For example, they could all be read through quickly by the teacher—in order to discover weaknesses, or to select passages for comment, or examples of good writing, for a further lesson. But whatever is done with them, they must on no account be passed over without comment; and experience teaches us that comments should be detailed

and particular. Judicious commendation here and there must never be omitted.

Such commendation is not mere honeyed bait; for if our pupils are to put an effort into their writing, it must help them to realize that each piece of writing that they do is important to us, and will be fairly judged; but to pass over their work in silence is to imply that what they have produced is either useless or unnecessary. If we sincerely want them to learn to write well, we must take each attempt seriously. By doing this we make them feel that their efforts are worthwhile, even though the actual writing may be rather feeble or careless, or even very poor. This is an unobtrusive technique that a good teacher uses, often not realizing its special value; but his reactions to their writing and what he says make his pupils feel the importance of the task of learning to write.

We may ask what actually does he do and say; but the secret is more in his attitude and his emphasis than in his actions and words. He achieves most by being sincerely interested in his pupils' efforts; for by treating these with adult seriousness, he shows that he values them. He also tries to make his pupils attack the problem of learning how to write in every piece of writing they do. For instance, whenever they write, they have to find an answer to the question: 'What is the best way to set about this job?'—and always, when there is time: 'How can this be improved?'

We might suggest, then, that the general policy might be: 'Make them conscious of problems of expression and communication, and make them eager each time they put pen to paper to try to find a way of solving a problem of expression.' Pupils in middle classes could tackle the problem in other lessons by asking themselves: 'How can I write up my science notes more clearly, or more fully?'—

'How can I make this English translation read like natural English, with the words running smoothly, instead of hobbling and hopping along on stilts?'—'How can I summarize that history lesson so that the important facts stand out in a connected narrative, instead of being mixed up in this jumble of fact and sentence?'

If we could ensure that our pupils would keep this problem of expression in mind whenever they write, so that they would always ask themselves: 'What exactly am I trying to say?'—'How can I put this idea into words?', we should then have half solved our own problem of trying to help someone else to write well. By making pupils *language conscious* we should be able to train them more effectively to manipulate language, and to treat it as an instrument that is to carry out some intention or to achieve some other end. This would also have the advantage of making them more conscious of meaning: and anything that increases awareness of meaning improves understanding—and also appreciation. Is not one of the main reasons why the Classics are such a magnificent discipline for the mind, that they make the pupil language conscious and meaning conscious, and in this way achieve the ultimate aim of the education of the intellect?

Now what else can be done in the classroom with the writing that a class has just done? Perhaps it is best for the children to look at their own work, and to try to find out how far the task has been successfully carried out; and if unsuccessfully, how far and where the writing has fallen short. For instance, they could look through their compositions, after a short discussion on the aim or intention of the writing, and then mark lines or paragraphs that seemed to them to be the most successful. Perhaps some of these might be read aloud, and the writer asked to give his reasons why he thinks the passage has achieved its aim.

Comments from the class (rather than criticisms) on the *good* qualities of each piece that is read aloud, and then suggestions for further improvements, would give them all a more definite understanding of what is good writing, and perhaps what they themselves must *do* to improve their own writing. This last point is often the crux of the matter: too often pupils do not know exactly enough what they should *do* in order to write better.

As this study of the completed task by the writers themselves is carried out week after week, with emphasis on *how* to describe, *how* to explain, or *how* to put forward arguments convincingly, some understanding of the ways that words can be used effectively will come, sometimes to one, sometimes to another, until by the end of the year most of the class will have learnt to write well enough on those themes that are within their interest and experience. But it is of no avail at all to spend time on explaining and giving instructions about good writing; for clear understanding will come only with the experience of writing—through ample practice and critical assessment.

No class can be taught to write well in one or two lessons; light dawns slowly for most young learners, especially the weaker ones, as they tackle first one task and then another; and even partial success in attempting a simple problem of expression may cause light to dawn; and when it does, however dimly, progress having begun may continue. It is so difficult for many pupils to increase their skill in writing, and so slow often is progress, that one must watch eagerly for the smallest step forward in order to commend it.

We might take the problem of description, and consider it as an example of what may be done with one part of the composition course. It is a fruitful topic to begin on, because most pupils find it within their powers, and be-

cause improvement is not very difficult to achieve. We must struggle hard at this stage to bring about improvement because this will give the much-needed confidence to those who have already abandoned hope of ever being able to write satisfactorily.

It is because descriptive writing is usually within the powers of the pupils that a high standard may be safely demanded. This would require a description of some real or imaginary scene to be so vivid that a reader would feel he was looking at it, or so life-like and intimate that he would feel he was living there. Some classes find interest in describing the room that they would like to decorate and furnish; the discussion, then, on 'My Room' might begin with suggestions for the special 'quality' of the room that each pupil would choose: the comfortable, the athletic, the gay, or the artistic. Some classes would need to discuss how to indicate a selected quality in a description; and some should be advised to take a room that they knew as the basis for their description. No doubt all would gain by talking over how one can bring out the high lights, or the need to select only those details that would be in keeping with the chosen quality. A good class, and perhaps too a mediocre one, would consider the following with profit: '. . . a painter makes the sitter, in a sense, more like himself, more expressive of the very essence of himself than he actually is at any single moment (as a photo might capture.)'

This theory of the painter making a portrait 'more expressive of the very essence' of a sitter may seem to some people to be too recondite or obscure for their pupils; but occasionally even lower-school pupils should be confronted with difficult ideas: often they like trying to digest them. It is not at all necessary, or profitable, to simplify everything always: to feed the weaker pupils on pre-masticated

mental food is no way to strengthen their intellects. On the contrary, theories that are the basis of mature practice, such as Conrad's 'By the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make you see',¹ are often of special interest to the boys and girls of the middle and upper school, who will often show surprising thoughtfulness and understanding concerning principles and faiths that govern the lives of adults. Free and thorough discussion of theories, too, is often fruitful, especially with lively and independent pupils.

The mastering of the skill of clear explanation will also normally be part of the composition course. Here, the choice of the things and processes to be explained will often determine success or failure; for common things of everyday life excite no one's desire to excel in language; and unless there is the *need* to explain, the task is a dull one. Boys will explain the working of machines and scientific apparatus with great skill; the tasks that demand their effort and imagination will extend their language abilities, and early success with easy but inviting subjects will ensure interest and increase of skill later, when more difficult and less familiar subjects are chosen. After writing, discussion on the accuracy, clarity, vividness of some of the work often produces helpful criticism; and classroom commendation or wider public recognition of those explanations that are especially successful usually has good results in improving pupils' attitude to their work and their writing.

The study of model passages to show various uses of language, or to set a high standard for a class, is often ineffective; for a model may be too far above the average pupils' powers, or its subject of little interest to them; but the purposeful use of language in explanation, in giving

¹ Preface to *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*

instructions, and such matter-of-fact usages, may be helpful, because these can be tested by the pupils, e.g., by drawing, by action, by making deductions. An excellent example like the following might be studied by a class, and its method analysed: 'GASKETS. There are many parts in an engine which fit into or against each other. It is not always possible to machine these parts to a perfectly smooth finish, and, as a result, when these surfaces are fastened together, there might not be perfect contact between them. This might result in an oil leak from parts of the engine where oil is used, or in a loss of compression where there is pressure. For this reason it is necessary to place a thin layer of soft material between surfaces which are bolted together. These thin layers are known as gaskets, and they serve to provide a tight seal between the parts bolted together.'¹

The use of language in explanation might profitably be carried beyond the study of good models; a class might collect examples in advertisements, engineering specifications, books on household hints, in 'Teach Yourself' publications, magazine articles, instructions for using apparatus, and in relatives' attempts to explain the working of mechanical things. The more advanced text-books on science and technology will yield good material for this further study, and a good class would soon find extracts of interest, if encouraged to seek for them in books borrowed from libraries. The following, for instance, could be used to illustrate the value and effectiveness of simile and metaphor in scientific explanation, a topic that has received unfortunate neglect: 'If a piece of matter—say, a lump of iron—is examined it appears to be a solid mass, but actually it is composed of minute particles known as

¹ I am indebted to Mr. J. Eagles of the Ottawa Technical High School for this explanation, which he had written for his class.

molecules, and these molecules are in turn composed of even more minute parts known as *atoms* . . . in the light of more recent knowledge it has been shown that even the atoms themselves are made up of tiny particles which are called *electrons* and *protons*. Another surprising fact is that these particles are not packed closely together, like grains of sand in a bag, but are separated by a good deal of space, and an atom is really a minute solar system, with a central body about which rotate one or more smaller bodies, in the same way as the earth rotates about the sun, but instead of making one revolution *per annum*, as the earth does, these tiny particles spin about their orbits many million times per second. The central body is the proton, and the others are the electrons.¹

Another profitable section of the composition syllabus is the writing up of 'A Record'—of a school journey, the Form production of a play, an end-of-term debate, a Hobbies Exhibition, the Form's Handwork Production of the year, or the Form's Experiments (and Disasters) in Cookery, Firework Construction, Cavern Exploring, Tentless Camping, Fancy-Dress Designing. Again, the pressure of truly exacting demands—for detail, accuracy, personal observation, true-to-life description—will nearly always raise the standard of the writing, *and* the interest in the task. Middle School pupils and the more senior classes should know that famous writers, scientists, explorers, naturalists, artists, are often fully aware of the need for these demands, and sometimes have to struggle to meet them. For example, Audubon, the American naturalist, writes of his efforts and persistent attempts 'to make the truth-telling record' of all he observed in the wild life of the woods; and that it was his ambition to do this that

¹ C. J. Mitchell: *A Manual of Electrical Technology*.

glowed in him for many years with fiery energy, until at last one could see that 'in his finest paintings of quadrupeds every tiny hair seems spun to tension by cold wind, or by fear, or by the lust for prey, and the small squirrels and prairie dogs and grey rats are shown in fleeting subtle movement. . . .' And Van Gogh tells 'how he sat down in a beech wood one evening as the sun was setting; the ground in front of him sloped and was covered with leaves, some dry, some rotting. "The difficulty was—and how difficult it was!—to reproduce the depth of colour and the enormous force and solidity of the ground." Then, looking again, he saw how much light there was in the gloom under the trees. "How to paint that light and not lose that other light—the deep glow of the turned and turning leaves that shone red-brown from the ground." . . .'¹

Though very many young girls write freely and fluently, the older ones sometimes find little interest in compiling reports, making surveys and recording the results of projects and experiments. Their changing interests and maturing tastes render them less responsive to the ordinary classroom proposals and activities, and they often lose confidence in school tasks: their personal affairs and their concern with themselves as persons lead their thoughts and interests away from learning and the increase of their skills and abilities. They have become more interested in human beings than in books and knowledge. It seems that as far as their writing is concerned, it would be necessary to tap these newly developing interests, and to discover what they enjoy outside school life, in order to suggest subjects and the kind of writing that they would find satisfying and helpful. The study of reports on fashion

¹ Lawrence and Elizabeth Hanson: *Portrait of Vincent*.

displays and the *dernier cri* in ballroom dance dresses, press accounts of film and play first-nights and galas, and autobiographies of famous women of the stage, the Bar, politics, literature and science, would afford opportunity for discovering various types of reportage, and would undoubtedly make the problem of writing more realistic and more interesting. It would be necessary to deal in class with the differing purpose and 'tone' of various types of report, and to have examples from newspapers, monthly magazines and other kinds of journal collected and discussed. For instance, the less studious girls in Middle and Upper-Middle Forms nearly always have an intense interest in ballet; and such a report as the following might lead them to study with fresh ardour the problem of writing reports: 'Her footwork was not so fast and neat as sometimes, but she showed again that marvellous control which dovetails movements when others would show the joints. She has *in excelsis* the typically English quality of *poise*, in which all display—even that of reticence—is consciously concealed.'¹

Senior classes, probably in all schools, should study and practise the presentation of Argument. They might attack the following types: how to develop and defend a doctrine, a theory, a policy; how to weight up evidence and draw conclusions; how to construct a well-knit chain of reasoning that will compel assent; how to confute an argument by demolishing each point in turn; how to deploy one's own case and carry a reader through some easy steps in thought to a consideration of the far-reaching implications of the subject. These topics might be dealt with in a formal, deliberate way as if the ideas and reasons and opinions were pawns to be moved here and there in handling a

¹ Margot Fonteyn in Ashton's *Cinderella*. An account by Alexander Bland (*The Observer*, 25 November 1956).

subject. That indeed is the suggestion; for most senior pupils have very vague notions of how to marshal their knowledge and thought, or how to bring forward their arguments in an attack on the weaker points of a proposal or deep-entrenched opinion. The less intelligent pupils usually find the handling of ideas and concepts very difficult; and therefore if they see the organization of thought on strictly formal lines, and can practise the deliberate deployment of argument and evidence, they will understand the possibilities of ordering fact, opinion and evidence in presenting a case. Even if they do not achieve any skill in this work, they will at least have some knowledge of it that may be serviceable to them later.

It is useful to have at hand some short incidental language exercises that may be brought in almost anywhere, and that may be handled informally and at odd moments, or when a longer plan comes to an end before the end of a period. The exercise 'Experimenting with Words' is often productive of good work; it could be introduced in this way: 'See what you can make of this: You are asked by a foreign visitor to explain the traffic regulations for a car driver; or to give some advice to a young learner who wants to ride a bicycle or knit a jumper, or handle an oar or punt, use a rifle, a bow and arrow, or make a speech.' Or 'Put into words your feelings when you take your first bathe of the year, or lose your purse, or are suddenly stopped by a policeman, or fall down, or wake up suddenly, or run against a post in the dark, or speak to a friend but find it is a stranger.' Perhaps the class should be told not to spend time on thinking how to express what is felt, but just to start speaking or writing the first words that come to mind. Then if those are not satisfactory, others can be sought: all pupils should try experimenting

with words, expressing the same thing in different ways, and then seeing which is the best.

Another exercise is similar but even shorter: using the flash-card technique, one could throw a number of topics quickly to a class, the pupils having to find words for them quickly in return, thus: 'What words best describe the colour of this book, the sound of the school bell, the shapes of those clouds?'—anything within sight or familiar. The purpose of such exercises is to give practice in finding words quickly in order to increase pupils' readiness with words. Later might come similar exercises in finding the most appropriate words to express various subjects suggested to and by the class.

Exercises of this nature, and some of those mentioned earlier in the chapter, are necessary not only for the increase of children's vocabulary but also for the general development of their minds. Such exercises are more useful than any word-finding exercise that is divorced from some task of expression, and they are far more effective for increasing vocabulary than isolated sentence-completing.

The kind of exercise that we should use freely is the kind that promotes an active mastery of language in communication. This mastery is of great consequence to school children, for it gives strength and confidence to their minds and characters: it has therefore a value far above many school tasks. In the narrower field of linguistic expression, we may be sure that only when school children are actively trying to express in words what they have in mind will they learn to use figurative language without artificiality, and only then will their manipulation of sentence structures and patterns become an unconscious habit, and their feeling for linguistic 'form' develop as a natural habit of mind. We have two tasks: 'to teach them the readiest way to another man's apprehension', as Ben

Jonson advised, and to improve their linguistic abilities for the benefit that that brings to the growth of their own minds and personalities.

Say what you have to say, what you have a will to say, in the simplest, the most direct and exact manner possible, with no surplusage.

WALTER PATER: 'Style' (*Appreciations*).

XIII

THE CORRECTING OF WRITTEN WORK

In the correcting of compositions, the master will note his approval of passages which shew ingenuity in selecting material and in its treatment.

ERASMUS: *De Ratione Studii*.

BEFORE we come to grips with the debatable subject of correcting compositions, we should recall that our aim is to produce effective writing, not merely correct writing. We mean by 'effective' the writing that, for instance, describes so precisely that a reader can easily imagine the scene described, or that presents arguments that compel attention. We hold that it should not be a teacher's sole intention to produce perfect compositions—'fair copies' written out again after meticulously careful correcting. On the contrary, his aim should be to develop the *habit* of noting and dealing with mistakes: thus, pupils are to be trained, rather than compositions perfected. This aim is selected because it is vastly more important to turn out writers who take pains to express themselves clearly and can attend to mistakes of language, than to turn out perfectly corrected compositions year after year. The ideal, no doubt, is to train our pupils to take pride in writing well-expressed, correct compositions, but if this is to be brought about, the pupils, not their teacher, must be responsible for their written work and for improving it.¹

The most important part of the plan of training pupils

¹ Examples of pupils' corrections of their written work may be seen in Appendix B.

to note and correct their mistakes, and perhaps the hardest part, is to develop this feeling of responsibility for their own writing. There is, obviously, only one way to do this, and that is the simple one of making them truly responsible, for nobody can learn to be responsible unless they are given real responsibility—a truism that is often disregarded. So from the start, by small degrees and easy routine ways, pupils must take over some of the correcting of their written work, and the amount of correcting they do increased gradually. This training should extend over the whole of the secondary school course; and its success should not be judged from the standard of correctness achieved in their written work at the end of the first year, or even at the end of the second; but from the standard achieved in their last year. As most adults cannot write perfectly correct English, it is not realistic to aim at perfect correctness in the work of the lower forms, or even perhaps of a third form.

We might note, too, that school children do not write in order to produce correct compositions for a printer, or for an exhibition, or for an entrance examination; and that there seems to be no point in a teacher's spending long hours, week after week, correcting compositions, when his pupils perhaps will not even glance at his corrections. Surely it is they who should be noting the mistakes, not the teacher. Furthermore, if their language abilities are being profitably exercised, and extended, mistakes *must* occur. It might be better to spring a surprise on them every now and again with some intensive correcting, rather than allow correcting to be a too ordinary routine. We are not likely to hit the target if we aim at the wrong one.

Nevertheless it is imperative that *some* training in producing reasonably correct writing must be given from the

beginning of the Secondary School course. For example, whenever any written work has been completed, some brief instructions on such lines as these might be given: 'Look through your work. Put the number of the mistakes you have found in it at the foot of the page. Correct as many as you can.' Or 'Everyone check spelling. Look up in your dictionaries all the long or uncommon words that you have used.' This would take only about three or four minutes in the lower forms. While it is being done, the teacher could walk round, glancing at some of the books (of the weakest boys especially) to see that alterations are correct, and if many mistakes are being missed. It is good technique not to point these out to the writers, as we want to train them to be 'mistake conscious'; though he might point to the line containing a mistake, or put a sign in the column opposite. But with a quick pupil all that is needed usually is: 'You have missed a mistake in your first paragraph' or 'One of your altered spellings is still incorrect.' Of course, weak pupils need more help; for example, at first they might correct only the first page of their work, and they might ask about any word that they were not sure of; the teacher could then correct the remainder, if he were sure of the pupils' attention to his corrections.

We should not forget that in helping weak pupils some restraint is always necessary, for we would not wish them to become hangers-on and underlings of the pen, but to grow into independent, self-reliant writers; therefore only the weakest pupils should be *told* a correct version, as there is only a waste of time if the pupil has not the knowledge and cannot find it; the others should always be made to suggest a correct version. Indeed research has revealed that nearly *all* pupils know the correct forms of language, including the grammar, much better than their teachers usually believe they do—any teacher can confirm this by

habitually making his pupils find the correct forms and punctuation for themselves.

In this training during the early years the same instructions and procedures will not be used on every occasion, for part of its success will be due to frequent variations in procedure, as these stimulate pupils' interest in improving and in polishing their written work. For example, sometimes pupils could exchange books, and a neighbour underline the mistakes, putting the number noted at the foot of each page; when books are returned, the writers then alter the mistakes. On the next occasion, after a similar procedure, the writers might look through their own writing again to see if any mistakes could be found that the correctors had missed. Some classes become eager to find mistakes when the books are changed yet again, and to seize the chance of convicting a friend of oversight in detecting mistakes, or of a blunder in marking a correct word as incorrect. If these and other ways of varying the procedure are devised, and brought in at irregular intervals through the term, the curiosity of a class can be kept alive, and everyone be well practised in attending to mistakes.

A plan that was tried out for several years aroused some interest and increased attentiveness: each pupil kept a graph of the numbers of his mistakes in written work. The effort to produce a falling, instead of a rising, graph was productive; it helped to make the correcting more accurate, and to instil the idea that polishing one's written work was a natural part of the job of writing, and that all adults who undertake responsible writing had the same task. To stir pupils' curiosity further, separate graphs for different kinds of error could be plotted, perhaps when interest in the composite error graph had flagged; and different colours might help too. Separating the graphs

might reveal weak pupils' special skill or failures which the composite graph concealed. These separate graphs, too, would indicate common weaknesses, and might be used as part of some informal research on the written work of a class, which could be undertaken partly by the writers themselves. They would undoubtedly find interest in looking at their work in this new way; and if such interest is aroused, greater demands on the pupils for extra care in correcting can be made safely, and often with still better results.

It would be worthwhile to explain to most classes that this polishing of one's written work is not just another school requirement, or a sly device for getting corrections done; but is a task that all writers, professional and amateur, have to do—and often are very particular about. If the corrected proofs of some book are obtained and shown to a class, even the sceptical pupils (and these can be very stubborn) might be convinced that adults have to deal carefully with details of punctuation, and have to correct their own spelling mistakes. Possibly the ideal thing would be for the teacher to hand out pages of his own typescript or galley proofs for a class to study and to correct. The effect of doing such a thing is usually astonishing, as nearly all pupils enjoy the opportunity of correcting a teacher's mistakes.

Teaching may be of a high order that can make use of material, relevant to the pupils' studies, that is handled in commerce, industry or business; and we all ought to be on the look-out for ways of bringing the real world into the classroom, for the classroom provides a training for the real world later; though sporadic attempts may be rather ineffective, as the older pupils begin to suspect a trick or an even bitterer pill that needs a specially sweet coating. But there seems to be no valid reason why pupils'

tasks and instruction should keep always within the limits of the traditional school material and procedure, or strictly to the available text-books. For children come to school to learn about what is outside school, and to master skills they will use in the outside world.

Of course, the best plan for the younger classes is to have written work produced for a form magazine, or for journals compiled by groups of pupils. The class can then be transformed into an Editorial Staff, when the time arrives for the scripts to be prepared for 'going to press'. Whenever pupils are young enough in mind to pretend that they are editors with blue pencils, they will deal strictly with their own writing and will treat it objectively as 'copy' handed in by 'Our Special Correspondent' or 'Our Star Reporter'; they would then soon acquire the habit of noting mistakes, and would become keen on not missing any, as they would be eager to earn the reputation of being competent editors.

Another plan that might be tried would be for the teacher to undertake 'An Error Frequency Count', with the help of the class. By doing this he could find out which mistakes were the commonest, and whether the incidence of the various types of mistake varied at all with different types of essay subject or with different pupils. If this were done (and it is an investigation that should be done with every class, for we know too little about pupils' difficulties), a frank explanation of the project should be made to the class, giving the reasons for the investigation and explaining its usefulness. The co-operation of most classes would undoubtedly be most willing: individuals, or groups, could keep careful records of all mistakes; and even if these records were not very accurate, they would be accurate enough for our purpose; the results after a term or two would be most instructive, and of interest to the pupils.

They would give perhaps clear indications of the kind of language exercise and training in expression that were especially needed by the class.

One of the chief values of a co-operative effort in compiling and analysing mistakes is that it helps to make pupils feel responsible for their work; it also helps to make marking and correcting more objective, lessening the slur on individual pupils for their consistent failure. Its effect on many classes indicates that such a project should be undertaken as the regular thing in English composition. We must realize that very many pupils *need* help in attending to details of language, and so it is essential to have a plan of a stimulating or enticing nature to enable them to concentrate on the dull task of scrutinizing their own words and of altering insignificant letters and stops—and to help them to feel that it is worth doing.

A plan of this kind has a further recommendation: it helps to strengthen the confidence and the independence of school children, who during their school years have so much arranged and done for them. The undesirable fact is that most of them have far too few obligations during the years of their rapid growth of mind and character. They are not accountable particularly for a very great deal of what they do: their lives are managed for them, and their thoughts are the thoughts of others—though, fortunately, their feelings are usually their own. This cannot be satisfactory. For the strengthening of their will and confidence they need to experience a happy pride in true responsibility, even if this is only for producing some presentable writing.

He maintained that it was the thought, not the phrase,¹ that must be polished. JOAN EVANS: *The Unselfish Egoist* (Joubert).

¹ Note.—‘phrase’ here no doubt refers to the sentence.

XIV

GRAMMAR

... in statements like 'this is a rose', 'my hand is resting on the table' ... familiarity with the mental operations involved has bred not so much contempt as oblivion.

R. G. COLLINGWOOD: *An Autobiography*.

THE wish to banish grammar completely from the school syllabus is perhaps not as widespread as is often thought; but that very many teachers dislike teaching the subject is indisputable. Those who were taught only Parsing and Analysis on very rigid lines at school may well be convinced that grammar cannot be taught in any way that is useful to children. Indeed few people seem to have discovered that the study of the forms and structures of language can lead directly to a clearer and fuller understanding of what they have in mind to express, and of the forms and modifications of their own thought. Those teachers who have discovered this about grammatical studies will have perceived also that these studies have a direct bearing on comprehension and the use of language in expression.

Unfortunately, nearly all writers of school grammars have neglected this useful and interesting aspect of grammar: its relevance to comprehension and expression. They have, almost to a man, presented the subject in their books as material to be explained, understood and remembered, instead of as material to be understood and *used*—by applying it to aid comprehension and to improve expression. It is as if almost all school arithmetic books gave instruction

in whole numbers, fractions, formulas for measurement, etc., but failed to provide exercises for the application and using of those symbols and formulas. But as teachers often cannot find in the grammar books that are supplied to their classes any exercises that apply the grammar to be taught, they cannot fairly be blamed for a certain amount of scepticism concerning the usefulness of the subject.

As far as can be seen, the general practice now is to teach *some* grammar. This usually consists of a bare minimum of the Parts of Speech, perhaps the commoner classes of these in the lower forms, and a fairly thorough handling of Clause Analysis in the fourths and lower fifths. Such scanty fare appears to be a concession to the general opinion that secondary school pupils should not be *quite* ignorant of the basic facts of grammar, though this brief summary may be unfair; nevertheless, most of the school text-books covering an English course include little more grammar than is indicated here, and many of them contain much less. Furthermore, the general consensus of opinion rarely holds a brief for much more than a bare outline. On the other hand, there are those who teach a fairly thorough grammar course in order to give their pupils a reasonable grounding for their learning of French or Latin; these usually see their way clearly and meet with few serious problems.

There are others, however, who see that grammar deals with relationships of meaning and with its modifications, with shades of thought, and with the expression of meaning in all its variety of structure and pattern. They realize that any study that sharpens a response to meaning must not be dismissed, or regarded as formal and unfruitful, or as a restricting examination requirement. These see that the grammatical functions of words are inherent elements

of the structures of thought that uses language as its medium; so that their teaching of grammar can hardly fail to be enlightening and useful.

Those who do no more than teach a bare outline of the subject cannot have explored its possibilities, and must find it difficult to make their teaching of it lively and helpful. The root causes of the failure to make grammar productive are, first, a close adherence to the theoretical aspect of the subject, instead of applying the theory to the practical using of the language—in composition and reading; and second, their divorce of grammar and meaning, which at a blow destroys the usefulness of the subject for school children.

Those who have failed to explore the possibilities and to persevere in experiment can hardly be blamed, because the value of teaching grammar has been frequently questioned, and at times it has been vigorously denied in print, at conferences and at refresher courses. And the teaching of grammar has received only lukewarm support officially in recent years; for instance, the Ministry's pamphlet, *Language*, has only 'It is only reasonable to suppose that a knowledge of the structure of sentences is useful at a certain stage in learning to write.' But when this 'certain stage' is reached, and how the knowledge may be useful are matters of conjecture. What we may be sure about, however, is that these attacks and this indifferent support are justified if no more than a bare outline of grammar is taught, and taught without direct application; for such a superficial and unrelated amount can have no value; it cannot help our pupils in any way to speak or write their mother tongue, and it does not even train them to avoid grammatical mistakes.

Our reply to the fair and obvious question: 'How can the learning of grammar be made useful to school chil-

dren?' is 'It can be made useful only if at every point possible it is closely associated with meaning, and only if the grammar is examined in and applied to language that arises or might arise in some real situation.' If these two guiding principles are not followed, to a greater or less degree, the grammar learnt will remain as inert knowledge and of no benefit to the learners unless the foreign language teaching makes use of it; in which case is it the English teacher's responsibility?

All language teachers are engaged in the task of training their pupils to be language conscious and consciously aware of exact meanings. This is so important, and with most pupils so necessary, that no kind of training that will help in this task can be neglected. Foreign language teachers associate the grammar of the language they teach with meaning and with the language of everyday life, and they associate the grammar with meaning in the closest possible way, at every point and in every step, through the secondary school course. Teachers of the mother tongue could also do this: they could apply grammatical theory to language practice by directing the study of the grammatical functions and relationships of words and sentences towards an understanding of the ways of words in their expression of meaning—both successful and unsuccessful expression.

For an example of 'the application of grammatical theory to language practice' we may take a grammar lesson with beginners on Adjectives. In such a lesson the application of the theory to expression work is very simple and direct, and it may be in fairly common use. The class first examines a number of sentences in a conversation or paragraph in order to find out the work of adjectives; that they are closely related to nouns and pronouns is discovered: 'The adjectives all go with nouns'—'What do

nouns do?"—"They name things (and persons)"—"What do adjectives "tell us about"?"—"About the things and persons named by the nouns." "Why are adjectives closely connected with nouns?"—"Because they tell us about the things that are named by their nouns." Further questioning may bring out the fact that adjectives (and nouns and pronouns) help to draw a listener's or reader's attention to persons and things. Then might come some practice in finding adjectives in a passage, and in noting what they tell us (or 'make us think about'). Next should come some simple application in which the pupils practise using adjectives to describe things or persons. The things selected should, of course, be of interest to the class, e.g., a good game to play indoors or at camp or on the sands at the seaside. Whenever possible some reason for describing the selected things should be evident or discussed or imagined. The need for adjectives might arise, for example, when a class intends to describe some games for a picnic, a programme for a holiday at the sea, or a plan for next summer's camp. The boys could describe the features of the car that they recommend their teacher to buy—the advice of many classes of boys would be well worth considering; perhaps the girls could describe the costumes for the next form play.

If this application exercise is successful, the grammar will be seen playing its natural rôle—as an essential part of expression; and the pupils will study and use language with some attention to grammar—to that which welds the structure of thought and its expression into understandable patterns.

We should not ask a class to describe commonplace things that no one would ever want to describe; for without interest, or purpose for choosing the adjectives, the exercise is superficial and ineffective. When there is time,

discussion could bring out the reasons why some of the adjectives are better for the purpose in hand than others, and which were the best. Such a discussion helps pupils to understand the need for selecting words carefully and for weighing up those that come first to mind. In this way the study of adjectives (and similarly of other Parts of Speech) helps to develop pupils' word-discrimination, which is often of slow growth, and which usually needs thoughtful tending. In this lesson we see grammar as part of language study and usage—as it should be.

It will have been noted that we recommend that one should teach 'adjectives refer to *persons* and *things*, either describing them or simply drawing attention to them'. We cannot recommend that children should learn that 'adjectives qualify nouns', as that is purely the theoretical and quasi-psychological part of the work of adjectives—and that has little or no value for children. And certainly children should not be taught that 'adjectives describe *nouns*', when it can quickly be made clear to every child that adjectives describe persons and things—real or imaginary. This function of adjectives in everyday language is so easily taught, is so sound linguistically, and so easily leads on to the useful application of the grammar, that it is strange how few grammar books have made use of this simple explanation.

That we use language in real life to refer to persons and events in a real world is the key to a sound and practical handling of grammar and language in schools; for the very convincing reason that, when that is done, a direct application of the grammar to expression of many kinds can be made. But if the theory that 'adjectives qualify nouns' is taught, there can be only a very limited application, and one that is of no use to children. This point in explaining the grammatical work of words can hardly be

emphasized too strongly, as the omission from grammar lessons of the part that grammar plays in real language in a real world has bedevilled the teaching of grammar in secondary education for too long.

We must note, too, that the chief *expressive* function of adjectives is to help nouns to name persons and things accurately. Thus in real life we can use adjectives to indicate exactly what we have in mind and are referring to; we can use adjectives to describe things so that the things referred to will be recognized immediately, or so that some detail in them will be instantly attended to by a listener, by the senses and the mind. And adjectives are our best instruments for achieving exactness in naming, indicating, pointing at, bringing to mind by means of language. This is worth teaching, for it is useful to speakers and writers, even young ones. But the work of 'restricting the application of nouns' is merely the logical function of adjectives, and one that operates only in special circumstances, such as in the situation of an undecided shopper indicating the *class* of a thing she wants to buy, and not naming the particular thing. This logical work is linguistic theory, and should be the concern, not of young school children, but of students studying linguistics, because problems of meaning, logic and the psychology of thinking are involved, such as 'how can a qualifying word enlarge meaning, yet at the same time restrict reference?'

Our next example might be suitable for a Second or Third Form (beginning its first term). By studying a suitable passage, a class can soon discover that pronouns, like nouns, refer to persons and things; though unlike nouns, they do not actually name these, or even name the class these belong to. The pupils can then be set to examine the pronouns that they used in their last written work; they would have to note what persons and things their

pronouns really referred to, whether they were intended to refer to those things, and whether the reference in every instance is clear to a reader. This is the important thing about pronouns: their reference must be certain, otherwise they are not being used competently. It is of very little use to know that 'they stand in place of a noun'. Examples of pronouns in pupils' work will usually reveal that clear and certain reference does not follow automatically whenever a pronoun is used; and that one has to check to make sure that the references of all pronouns in the writing are clear.

The next stage in the lesson on pronouns might be an examination by the pupils of some newspaper articles or their own 'comics' to see if writers who write for a living are careful to make their pronouns refer clearly to the things intended. A good class will discover that sometimes such pronouns as 'that', 'it', 'they' are not exact, and that occasionally it is difficult to find out what they do refer to. This may lead to a discovery that it is *context* that will often reveal whether a reference ought to be exact or not, for sometimes a writer may intentionally refer vaguely to things in general or to unspecified persons. This scrutiny by the pupils of the references of the pronouns in writing is a useful and necessary exercise, for 'Pronoun Trouble' is one of the most prevalent weaknesses in school children's writing, even up to the top forms, and no doubt beyond: a direct attack on it is long overdue.

Another type of application of the grammar learnt can be illustrated in exercises that will train second-year or slow third-year pupils to use words accurately. For instance, having acquired some accuracy in distinguishing adverbs from adjectives and in finding adverbial phrases, the pupils could pass on to 'the exact expression of action' by means of verbs and adverbs. At first, these exercises

may be fairly simple: 'What adverbs best help verbs to express actions such as an aircraft touching down, a hockey player scoring a goal, automobiles starting after an extra long "Red" stoppage, a bulldozer clearing the last of a demolished house, a young driver taking her sports car out for the first time alone, a skilful knitter using a knitting machine?' If at the end of the lesson the pupils state their best choices for each 'subject', their interest in weighing up words and their keenness in finding good ones would be stimulated. The more general aim would be to develop the habit of attending to language and of trying always to improve it.

When these exercises have been carried out, and further practice given if necessary, expression work that demands some continuity should be attempted, such as the using of adverbs in more complete scenes, events, situations. Descriptions of different 'characters' skating, dinghy or model yacht sailing, bird watching, film making, interviewing sports' celebrities, etc. (perhaps for the form magazine, or for a short story), would demand a variety of verb and adverb to express the various actions precisely.¹ Later the class could work on descriptions of ski-parties, or boating or climbing expeditions, for the beginning of a serial story. In this more ambitious work there could be discussion on different ways of expressing the selected actions and movements, the class deciding which were the best suggestions, though not necessarily coming to a conclusion on every one. Naturally, when a class finds some scene or situation particularly interesting, more care and time could be given to the search for the best wording.

¹ We should note, however, that often it is the Object in the sentence, not the Adverb, that helps the verb to express an action precisely; as in 'He carefully adjusted the micrometer screw-gauge' contrasted with 'He carefully adjusted the driving-seat', where the Objects give us the clue to the fineness or coarseness of the two actions.

This kind of application of the grammar studied will give the pupils an idea of the contribution that a knowledge of grammar can make to the problem of writing effectively.

As with adjectives and adverbs, so with adjectival and adverbial phrases and clauses. The pupils themselves will often be able to find out the useful purpose that clauses have in description, narrative, explanation, etc., and they can then apply what they have discovered to similar pieces of writing. For example, the exact details that adjectival clauses can supply to the description of a person, scene or situation in a story might be scrutinized, and then a similar description attempted: the proposals of the class being assessed according to the success of the clauses suggested in forwarding the story, or increasing its interest, or some other quality. In doing this, it is sometimes instructive if the pupils find single adjectives to take the place of the adjectival clauses; this will bring out the fact that often the single adjective is much vaguer and more general than the clause: thus the pupils might perceive more concretely the purpose and usefulness of adjectival clauses.

In using adverbial clauses pupils can learnt to express in their stories exact ideas of time, place or manner; they could re-write short passages of dictated narrative, making these more exact and detailed by adding clauses. As before, a short critical discussion should normally end lessons of this kind, so that there is an assessment of the clauses proposed; and those clauses which contribute some detail that is essential to the story can be noted, and the importance of the contribution estimated. If this is done, it will be advisable to have passages that contain a single incident, or one that is complete enough for decisions to be made about it; otherwise the discussion may be rather fruitless or inconclusive.

As with the above, so in similar ways, almost every grammatical item can be used to lead to a fuller understanding of the usefulness of the grammar studied; and so too each grammatical category can be studied in the pupils' prose texts, to find out what each contributes to a passage. The question is 'What does this particular item contribute in this sentence, or in this paragraph?' Most pupils soon find out that adjectives may reveal some trait of character, or some other point that is cogent to the story (e.g., Why does the writer use the word 'some' here?). They should discover that adverbs and adverbial clauses may contribute details that are relevant to the plot, or that add something of interest, of excitement, or some quality—if the writing is good enough. The value of directing attention to the contributions of the various grammatical items is that this leads to a fuller comprehension of the passages: thus more exact reading is achieved—and therefore more exact thought. It is by such means that pupils are trained to become aware of language, especially of what is said, and of *how* it is said. In addition their powers of choosing and assessing words are developed, and thus they become more alive to the qualities of thought.

There are, then, two lines of attack: for the pupils to make use knowingly of suitable grammatical items in their speaking and writing; and for them to note the effect that is produced, or what difference is made in meaning. Secondly, they can examine the use of these items by the authors they are reading, and try to find out why the item under review was used.

A third way of making the study of grammar useful is to relate it to the correction of written work; this is well known, but may not be so profitable as the other ways. Unfortunately, if few teachers insist on corrections being

carried out by the pupils, this method of applying the grammar learnt will not be in regular use. Indeed many teachers hold the view that learning grammar provides reasons for the correction of mistakes in the pupils' writing; but it is a regrettable fact that very many of these so-called grammatical reasons do not logically or accurately explain any error. Also we might ask sceptically how often are these grammatical reasons supplied by a teacher or a pupil to explain an error?

Nevertheless, the teaching of grammar will be far too formal, and its value far too small, if one at least of these three ways of making the grammar useful is not included in the work. Otherwise the time and effort given to grammar teaching, when there are so many other and more important things for the pupils to master, cannot be adequately justified.

Dialectic . . . banefully affecting grammarians with the conviction that language was the creature of reason, and must conform to principles of logic.

H. O. TAYLOR: *The Mediaeval Mind*, Vol. II.

XV

THE MECHANICS OF LANGUAGE

He [Quintilian] implored the teachers of his own day to arouse the pupils' understanding and interest, instead of forcing them into mechanical learning as most of the Roman schools were doing.

MARCHETTE CHUTE: *Ben Jonson of Westminster.*

EMPHASIS, as we have noted previously, will always be on expression and on comprehension; and as the greater part of the time spent on the mother tongue will be devoted to these two main divisions of the subject, there will not be very much time left for everything else—for spelling, punctuation, vocabulary, dictionary work, the structure of the paragraph, prosody, etc. But to leave little time for all of these things is justifiable, for much that is usually studied in these topics, including most of the conventional grammar *as now taught*, is unavoidably analytic and theoretical, and therefore not able to give help or practice either in using language or in responding to it. Even the study of the structure of a poem, short story or play is an analysis, and not a first-hand experience of literature, and so may be more akin to science than to aesthetics. Analytic, theoretical and mechanical processes cannot give much help to a pupil in his efforts to gain a command of his mother tongue. We should therefore reduce the time given to work of that kind, and allot more to expression work and comprehension and appreciation; for one of the most valuable things that a school can do for a pupil is to help him to make full and effective use of his gift of language, whether he has been generously endowed or but meagrely.

'But surely', the argument will run, 'there should be a greater place in the time-table for the improvement of a mechanical skill and for analytic exercises than the one suggested here.'—'Yes, possibly, for some pupils,' is the reply, 'but not the dominating place that is given to them by many teachers, and in many school syllabuses now in force.' It is arguable that they should be given a very small place in an English course, because they can normally be dealt with as occasion arises in the all-important composition and comprehension course. However, by cutting out much of the work often done on derivations, word-formation, synonyms or on other word studies carried out without any local and contextual habitation, and far removed from any expression exercise, a little more time might be allotted to the simple elements of language. Also by postponing all such analytic work as the study of prose and verse structure until the last two or three years, there would be time in the lower forms to do all that is needed in the fundamental mechanics of language: in spelling, punctuation, sentence-structure, and the strictly essential grammar, such as concord and the use of pronouns.

We see therefore that more time at the beginning of a secondary school course could be given to the essential mechanics, but some of the other topics mentioned above touched on only occasionally in the lower forms, and not made the subject of a whole period, except when especially needed, as when original verse is to be written. Literary form, prosody and the analysis of prose and verse structures can then be given proper attention in the last years of the course, when the pupils are ready for that kind of work.

The right solution of this problem is clear: the strictly mechanical elements of language (including for example the use of capitals, abbreviations, letter headings and endings) should be dealt with in the pre-secondary stage, that

is, at the top of the primary school, when a great deal of 'free expression' is being done, and done with zest. If we judge from the amount of time that has now to be spent on the sheer mechanics of language in the first and second years of a secondary school, we may be certain that this part of the work should be dealt with very much more thoroughly in the last years of the primary school than it is nowadays. It may be that the necessity for 'free expression' in the earlier years leads to the idea that the mechanics of language do not matter, or that they can be attended to later: this is a wrong view.

When young children are keen to write, that is the time to teach them the mechanics, though of course these should be given in small doses, as a subsidiary part of a lesson devoted to writing continuous passages; for the continuous piece of writing is the best means for developing pupils' power of thought and expression, as Quintilian wrote in about A.D. 90: 'Expression is the main object of instruction; that is what art alone can give us, that ought to engage our every effort, the end of all our exercises';¹ and it is the *using* of the mechanical elements in this continuous writing that is required, not merely an exact *knowledge* of them. Is it possible that we aim too often at exact knowledge of these mechanical elements rather than at the development of the habit of using them correctly? In the mastery of language, which includes correctness, usage is all.

The mechanical elements, then, should receive attention very frequently for at least two or three years—the last years in the primary school; and after that practice and exercises on them might be set only when required by the majority of a class, or if some difficult point needed special attention. It is surely quite wrong for a Form Three to

¹ *Institutio Oratoria*, Lib. VIII, Proem. III.

have to do exercises in punctuating and spelling, except very occasionally; or unless a class is very weak. When, however, many pupils in a class make numerous mistakes in the mechanics of language, the remedy is a closer supervision of pupils' corrections, or simply more correcting by the pupils, not further instruction or formal exercises for the whole class, which might be considered the best remedy.

It is evident that most exercises in the mechanics of language have a very limited value, for practising the use of the conventions of language and print, divorced from pupils' handling of language in expression and communication, even though in complete sentences, is for the weaker pupils a task to be finished, not a training that they can see is necessary; and it cannot *of itself* ensure a 'carry over' to the pupils' writing habits. Again, as in the grammar, there needs to be application in a paragraph or more, especially for those pupils who make many mistakes. So that, when formal exercises have been run through, in the last part of the lesson the pupils should be occupied in some writing that involves the using of the items to be practised, or in scrutinizing some interesting pieces of prose to find out how the writers of them use the items in question. If this were done, at least occasionally, pupils would see that the more mechanical elements of language have some relevance to the expression of thought and feeling, and to the use of language in everyday life.

Indeed, all the mechanical elements of language should be demonstrated in interesting or forceful contexts; and historical details too are sometimes helpful in throwing light on spelling, pronunciation, inflexion and syntax, such as the strong influence of the printed word on the pronunciation of proper names, e.g., on 'Derby', 'Uttoxeter', 'Cirencester'; or such as the effect of printing on spelling,

or as the attempts of our ancestors to spell their own names and names of places phonetically. School children, even the slowest 'streams', should not be left with the impression that these language mechanics are merely school matters, and that they have little relevance to the affairs of real life, or to an adult use of language.

We have referred to the postponement of the analytic type of study, and especially of the study of structure in composition and literature, and have suggested that these studies were best postponed until after the class had achieved some mastery of the mechanics of language and some fluency in their writing. By delaying the study of structure until later in the course we should secure greater attention to it, as older pupils become very critical in their attitude to language; and they are then so much better equipped to appreciate the usefulness or necessity for the study of a topic. Their wider reading and greater thoughtfulness enable them to perceive how structure affects the presentation of the central idea of a poem, story or play; they are better able to trace the development of the action of a play, its complication, and the quality of the writer's art in unravelling the threads that he has been weaving. Thus, instead of the significance of the various literary types passing over the heads of the lower or lower-middle forms, the topic can be handled thoroughly in the upper school, as an aspect of art and aesthetics of mature interest. Fuller understanding would then follow: for example, the compactness and complexity of a sonnet, giving scope to balanced reasoning and parallel comparison, would be more finely appreciated, especially if contrasted with the light brevity of a lyric of Ben Jonson or Herrick. The significance of structure, even if only that of a paragraph, is based on logic, aesthetics and the controlled handling of language in the expression of experience: clearly it is

better to keep this aspect of the work for later study with senior classes.

So, too, whenever a topic is presented as an adult and mature concern, there is a further gain in interest and effort. There seems to be every reason why the topic of structure, and similar topics, should be attacked as late as possible, and not tinkered with, or forced on pupils, years before they are really capable of appreciating art forms, or the simpler principles of criticism. The appreciation of structure, intellectually and aesthetically, is a late growth for most people; and it cannot be 'forced' in the early spring-time of life, as if it were rhubarb or celery—at least, not without warping the growth of the young plant.

Knowledge is an experience, not a formula. It is foolish to hand out the formulae.

D. H. LAWRENCE: *Etruscan Places*.

He [the young Einstein] found it more and more intolerable to be compelled to memorize rules mechanically, and he preferred to suffer punishment rather than repeat something he had learned by rote without understanding!

PHILIPP FRANK: *Einstein: His Life and Times*.



XVI

WHY POETRY?

They [the great poets] express deep intuitions of mankind penetrating into what is universal in concrete fact.

A. N. WHITEHEAD: *Science and the Modern World.*

WE shall all agree: poetry cannot be *taught*. It can be read in school, studied, learnt by heart, written (occasionally), and it can be enjoyed. By 'taught' we mean as a foreign language is taught, or as a skill or factual knowledge can be taught. However, as the word 'teaching' covers a variety of activities in the classroom, we may perhaps equate the words 'teaching poetry' with 'taking poetry in class', and for the sake of brevity leave unanswered the question: 'What do you mean by "teaching poetry"?'

Every teacher of literature, nevertheless, ought to answer the question: 'Why am I teaching poetry?' Or 'What am I trying to achieve in my poetry lessons?' For without an answer there may be no clear direction in his work, or definite criterion to enable him to decide what to do; unless he is one of the few gifted teachers of literature who do the right thing because they see that so surely and so steadily, their own sound experience of poetry having revealed it to them. But for most of us questions like these are not easy to answer: they require some very straight thinking, as well as some unflinching honesty, especially with one's pet theories and deep-rooted convictions. In viewing possibilities, we might ask ourselves: 'Do I think

that my pupils ought to know something about poetry because that is part of the proper equipment of an educated person? Or, do I believe that a true education must include an appreciation of "the beauties of poetry"? But perhaps our eyes, without our realizing it, are hypnotized by examinations, and as these have questions on poetry, we have no choice in the matter.

Let us consider these possibilities very briefly. We would all agree that an educated man should know some of the great literature that comes to him from the past, in his own language, but fed also by strains from France, Wales, Scotland, Rome, Greece, Palestine and other countries. But unfortunately very many pupils (on both sides of the Atlantic) leave school only half educated, and there may be other subjects that they need more than poetry. Nevertheless we ought to do all we can to help them to discover and enjoy some of this great literature, because an English lesson will very often be the only opportunity they will ever have of any contact with the literary heritage that is rightfully theirs. As for 'the beauties of poetry', and for beauty in any form, we know that the human spirit needs to be strengthened and sustained by the best that has been thought, felt and expressed. There are, however, persons in responsible positions who seem to think that such strengthening is not particularly necessary, for they are lukewarm about poetry for children; but no one would deny that our pupils need the help and encouragement that they would get by enriching their minds and memories with the thoughts and words of the great writers and the great thinkers. And examinations?—Yes, of course, it is our plain duty there, too, to help our pupils to do as well as they can in their examination hurdling. But there are more reasons than these for taking poetry in school.

One of the main reasons why poetry is so important for

children is to be deduced from the *quality* of the language of the better poems that they will read for enjoyment and inspiration. But we must make a distinction here between the 'language of poetry' and 'poetical language': 'poetical language' is the stereotyped use of language in verse that is supposed to be especially 'poetic'; 'the language of poetry' is any language that can hold the mind to its poetic form and compel it to work creatively. Those who belittle the value of poetry for children may not be aware that few English specialists nowadays will hold a brief for a conventional 'poetic' diction, and that poetry for children is now very different from the poetry that was considered suitable for Victorian children: to scoff nowadays at poems about frisking lambs, warbling feathered fowls and purling brooks betrays ignorance of what children are reading.

The language of good literature, and especially of our greatest poetry, is *necessary* for those who are learning to use language effectively. It is necessary also for those who are learning to become responsible and responsive persons, alive to the significance and value of things and events—good and bad. It is *necessary* because this language is precise and expressive; because it has a unique, indefinable power of nourishing and quickening a perceptive mind; because its special vitality enables the reader to rise to intellectual heights and to achieve imaginative experiences that far surpass in wonder and richness anything that he could apprehend by his own powers. The reader, in having his mind constantly filled and dominated by this precise and vivid language, becomes accustomed to precision and vitality in his thinking; and the greater the poetry he reads with critical enjoyment, the richer in vitality and the finer in precision is his thinking likely to become; for the distinctive quality of great poetry is that it will inspire and

re-vitalize the minds and lives of those who read it with complete absorption and finely judged appreciation.

When a reader 'understands' what he is reading, his thinking and imagining are conforming to the sentence structures of the writer, and falling into his thought-patterns: we can then be sure that the more precise, or the more penetrating, or the more vivid, is the thought and language of the poet, the more valuable will it be for the reader to have that language constantly in his mind. This may be similar to a player of a musical instrument, who will never achieve mastery of his instrument and all its potentialities if he habitually plays inferior music. On the other hand, by frequently attempting to play the music of the great masters, his technical skill will increase, his perception of what is great music and his ability to appreciate it will grow and develop in fineness of perception and enjoyment. The value of critically appreciative reading of great literature for the maturing mind, as the pupil passes from childhood through adolescence to an untried and vulnerable manhood, is incalculable.

This emphasis on the language of poetry is not to imply that the language is more important to children than the content of the poem—what the poem presents to the reader's thought and imagination. The two—language and content—are inseparable. Therefore the language is valuable to the mind because the content also is valuable; it is valuable because it presents fresh and revealing experience to the hungry and exploring mind. For poetry presents experiences to us, not so much for us to participate in, as to *re-create* for ourselves—through the activities of intellect, imagination, emotion and memory. By experiences, we mean, for instance, enjoying the view of London from Westminster Bridge at the opening of the nineteenth century, and seeing what Wordsworth saw, and feeling

and thinking what he felt and thought—with the additional virtue of the pleasure in his words.

There is nothing recondite or mystical or vaguely aesthetic about this fact of empathy, as it is called, this entering into the experience of another person, through the quickening, re-creative potency of the words and the co-ordinating design of the poem. The words of poetry enable us not only to enjoy an experience that the poet had, and his expression of it; but to respond in the same way as the poet, re-creating the experience by means of *our own* powers through the agency of *his* words and their formal artistic pattern.

The experiences that poetry (and of course all literature) brings to children are peculiarly valuable to them, and possibly more valuable to them than to an adult mind, unless that mind is still growing in stature and sensitiveness. And even those experiences that fail to excite us in our maturer years but which children enjoy, are valuable to them, possibly much more so than we realize; for young pupils' enjoyment is the touchstone, not the excellence of the poem; and most children enjoy such poems as 'Incident in a French Camp', 'Hervé Riel', 'The Lady of Shalott'.

Poetry is valuable, and indeed necessary, because, first, wider experience stocks the mind with memories, thoughts, attitudes, emotions, as well as with facts. Poetry keeps the mind fresh, responsive and open to receive new impressions and new understanding, and richer appreciation of what is of value. It can also fend off the closing of the cage of custom, of age, hardness of heart, or simply dislike of being disturbed out of a slothful bed of downy ease; it can save us from routine responses and the lazy comfort of tram-line thinking. It is valuable, secondly, for the reason that all fine conduct, fine art and the wonders of nature give us

the assurance that the world is not always 'brutish and short', not only 'red in tooth and claw', not only a 'survival of the fittest'; and that there is something beyond 'the snottery of our slimy time', as Marston put it so appropriately for us. Poetry reveals to us that hope also flourishes, and happiness and courage and belief in goodness. Children's conceptions of the good things in life and what is valuable are built up very gradually: poetry plays an essential part in this developing sense of values.

It will be agreed that to have the best thought, and the best expression of that thought, often passing through our minds is the finest education we can have, as those who have understood the true value of the Classics have always known. This is the strongest of all our reasons for taking poetry in school; but with this proviso: that the poems are taken in ways that will allow the minds and imaginations of the pupils to be filled with the *poet's* thought, images, rhythms; and that will allow their feelings to respond to the inspiration of the poet's words.

The words should focus the experience, as well as express it; they do not disperse it, nor, for example, stimulate to action, or free imagining; and therefore miming or acting to express responses to good poetry is unsound, and drawing and illustrations of poems are to be deprecated.

In referring to the formal artistic pattern of poetry—the 'Form' of poetry, we mean by 'formal' here that it is not formless, amorphous, unshaped. The 'Form' is part of the excellence of a poem; and when we are following the words of the poet closely, and are allowing his thoughts and images to take possession of our minds, we are also keeping to the design and structural pattern of the poem we are reading; that is, if we are keeping to its arrangement and order. Then, during the time we are reading,

our thoughts and feelings are being ordered, directed and shaped in the form of the poem. With good poetry, therefore, our minds are being subjected to a highly disciplined order and a shapely structural form. What we might have thought and imagined in a loose, general, unintegrated manner, is condensed, compacted, and as it were crystallized; for the expression in any art of what the artist holds in his imagination may be regarded as a *crystallizing* in a formal pattern of his rich imaginings. Instead of a loose, irresponsible design, there is a concentration and a heightening of experience. Art does not slacken or stimulate the emotional energies irresponsibly, or dissipate them. It engages their forces, for great art is the distillation of many imagined and strongly felt experiences.

When we are properly trained in the reading of poetry, our thinking becomes habituated to the finer lines and proportions of orderly well-shaped expression, and we become not only better able to appreciate the great poems, but we become capable of better *thinking*. This is part of the discipline of great literature, and indeed of all the arts. In other words, it is in recapturing again and again the thoughts and conceptions of the great writers that we may become habituated to, and at home with, finer and more penetrating modes of thinking and imagining. This is an important aspect of education; this is what we are trying to do for our pupils, so that they too may profit from this mental discipline, this rarer creative activity, this intellectual reaching out beyond their everyday, limited and mundane thinking; so that they may grow in mental ability and power.

But, you may think, there is no reference here to the mechanics and the facts of poetry—to rhyme schemes, verse forms, scansion, or even to figures of speech! The reason for this is that the two great values of poetry—

experience and its expression—are so much more important for the growth of our pupils' minds and characters than everything else connected with literature. Indeed all the rest (including poetic form, history of literature) is of very minor importance for school children and for youth at the threshold of manhood and womanhood *compared with* the impact that great language makes on their minds, and the imaginative experiences it provides for them. Great literature can transfigure them, though but temporarily; nevertheless, we believe, some radiance remains.

We are apt to neglect the truth that through literature our pupils can come into close contact with great minds and their powerful thinking in their search for truth. And who could deny that the words of the great writers ought to live often and *undiluted* in the minds of our pupils, and should sound there, if possible, now like 'the music of the spheres' singing of epic greatness, now like 'a flood of harmony' drawing them away from the myopic materialism of the mundane world, and assuring them that things of the spirit, of which beauty is not the least, *can* triumph in that same world. By constantly flowing through their minds, the words of the great poets, ushering in great thought, accustom their minds to recognize and meditate on the ultimate values, and to profit from the severer intellectual climate and more exacting apprehensions of truth demanded by great literature.

For poetry is the blossom and the fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language.

S. T. COLERIDGE: *Biographia Literaria*, xv.4.

XVII

POETRY IN THE CLASSROOM

I'll never, never meet such a man again. You ought to have heard him recite poetry—his own, too, it was, he told me. Poetry! . . . Oh, he enlarged my mind.

JOSEPH CONRAD: *Heart of Darkness*.

NO topic in the school curriculum has so many pitfalls as the taking of poetry in the classroom: it is easier to go astray in attempting to promote aesthetic responses to a poem than in any other kind of lesson. We need, therefore, to be especially wary of what we do, particularly when taking poems with middle forms. Unfortunately, the usefulness of a description of the pitfalls, and how to avoid them, is very limited; nevertheless if further consideration of principles and practice can be encouraged, then something worthwhile will have been achieved.

It is especially necessary to examine one's principles in the teaching of poetry, and to make sure they are philosophically and aesthetically sound; for we have to be sure that sound principles, and not repetitive custom or routine habits, determine what we do in the classroom, and what we do not do. A stocktaking of our theories and fast-dyed convictions may well be overdue, as is the jettisoning of defensive slogans, unscrutinized imitative procedures, and the unconsidered beliefs about poetry that have grown up with us from childhood.

How can we summarize our responsibilities to our pupils for their training in poetry? Our first aim, no doubt, is to

try to help them to enjoy poetry; the second to help them to discover more in each poem than they could discover by themselves; and the third to try to get them to go on reading poetry: they may then become capable of understanding, and later of appreciating the great poems in our language. Therefore, there will not be any occasion for scansion, chat about verse-form, rhyme schemes, or any raking over the fine tilth of poetry to find alliterations, assonance, vowel harmony. How can a breaking-up of the surface increase pupils' appreciation, or even their simple understanding of a poem? Certainly the sounds of words often express more than is sometimes realized; but naming varieties of 'sound-effects' (as if they were 'noises off') cannot help an imaginative ear to hear. We ought to be very cautious, and humble too, in relying on our talk or on our pupils' 'picking out' to aid appreciation.

As regards procedure, it is not possible to indicate what can be done, even if one knew, because each poem has to be presented to a class and studied, if it is to be studied, in a way that best fits it, its form, content and quality. For example, Keats's 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer' requires a reader to put himself first in the place of the poet, then of an astronomer, then of 'stout Cortez'; and with seniors the significance of 'first looking into' for exact appreciation of the poem might be considered. But Shakespeare's 'When in disgrace . . .' would have to be taken in a different way, for it requires an imaginative identification with a single character, and a complete reversal of emotional experience. Similarly the ballads individually need different procedures, though most of them are straight narrative. For example, 'Sir Patrick Spens' requires much less, imaginatively, than 'The Wife of Usher's Well', which demands greater intensity of imagination, more tender and precisely differentiated

emotions in order to experience the interaction of feeling between the wife, the maid and the sons. We may note here that though vividly dramatic, this poem is narrative in form, and of fine imaginative quality, and therefore should be read, not acted.

There is also the sound principle that every teacher ought to develop his own way of taking poetry in class. In this matter, if in no other, better teaching will result if a man is handling a subject in the way he believes in, and that suits his special abilities and interests. The effect on his pupils will be better, for there will be more conviction, enjoyment and sincerity in his treatment of poetry; and these are of far greater importance and value than skill in handling dexterously an impressive method. As the taking of poetry in school is a matter of personal choice, we find that some teachers concentrate on training their pupils to read poetry aloud, others like to begin with the younger ones writing verses, parodies, ballad-imitations; some rely, especially at first, on chorus work; others strongly favour the developing of taste and judgment, and some like to foster attention to rhythms, sounds, images, and verbal felicities. There is, however, wide agreement nowadays on the introduction of some critical training before the last year at school.

There can be no doubt about the soundness of the plan to encourage first and second forms to write verse, and to play with rhyme schemes, limericks, ballad metre and other verse forms. Clearly this is the best way to get facts about rhyme schemes, scansion and the forms of poetry learnt; and usually a number of children produce some happily worded verses, and gain a liking for poetry through their success in handling verse forms. But the training of beginners to read poetry aloud should not be delayed: this might well form part of the course for three

or even four years. This will be fruitful, for if pupils read a poem aloud well—so that the teacher himself enjoys the reading, we may be sure that they have appreciated the poem, and have understood it. It may be argued that some pupils read aloud well without much understanding or appreciation of a poem, or a passage of prose. That is true, a few pupils can do that; but the majority need to understand a poem and to appreciate some of its qualities before they can read it aloud well.

This leads us to a second reason for training children to read poetry aloud: it encourages them to pay greater attention to what the poet has said, and to try to discover its meaning—especially who is being addressed, who is speaking and the attendant circumstances. Some of them find, too, that if they know these things, they read the poem better, and they enjoy it more. Such an achievement is important; for it often brings a new experience to a pupil, perhaps revealing to him some hidden beauty; and, because he then feels the poem more deeply and consciously, his sympathies are enlarged, and his powers of appreciating what is good are increased: perhaps they become more inherent in his personal make-up.

When this objective of reading aloud is chosen for a third or young fourth year, the emphasis at first might be directed to the study of a number of very different poems, in order to find out how each should be read aloud. To help a class in this study; questions could be asked in order to pin attention to profitable lines of enquiry. For example, 'Should this sonnet (e.g., Milton's 'On his Blindness') be read at an unvarying pace?'—'Where might changes be made?'—'Will these be marked strongly?'—'If strongly, where?' In answering such questions, pupils find out that there should be a marked change in pace in the last three lines, the pace quickening in the 12th and 13th lines, but

in the last line changing to a slow, deliberate and measured rhythm. Then will come the essential question: 'What reason have you for suggesting these changes?' It is essential, because the training should give pupils practice in discovering for themselves how poems are to be read aloud. They therefore can easily discover that in the meaning of the lines and in their sounds there will be clues pointing to the right rhythm, as in 'Thousands . . . speed And post o'er land and ocean without rest.'

We might add here that the discovery of clues that indicate how the reading should go, or what the meaning is, provides a possible line of interest for classes of literal-minded pupils, or for those whose pleasure in poetry is on the wane.

A sure way of helping pupils to become aware of the qualities of a poem is for the teacher to read the poem, the class having books open. But this way will be sure only if he has taken pains to learn to read aloud. Some readers have a natural ability to read aloud with flexibility and restrained expressiveness; but most of us have to learn to read with clarity of voice, distinct articulation of consonants, and with full control of the ample breath that is necessary to transform print into sound for an audience. Most of us, too, have to learn to read with supple voice and the flowing rhythm that the meaning and the words have, and also with the tones of the voice expressing the meanings and emotions of the poem. We see that all this is not to be taken lightly: that is why we have emphasized the necessity for taking pains to master the art of reading poetry aloud (and without the mournfulness of Dauber's whales). To reach a high standard in the reading, and then, when reading a poem to a class, to keep mind and imagination undeviatingly on the words and the meanings of the lines, is asking a good deal; but

clearly not too much when one considers the value of poetry to children of school age, and the difficulty of helping them to like, to understand, and also to appreciate poetry.

The need to keep mind and imagination unswervingly on the words and meanings of the poem, while reading it aloud to a class, must not be underestimated, because when a poem is read in that way, listeners will often be aware of the elusive and exciting thrill of aesthetic experience, though the reader will not be aware of this. It may happen even in reading quite poor poems, if the reader can lose himself in them. But he must keep his mind from wondering what listeners are thinking or doing, or whether they understand the poem, or what his reading is like, or what comes next—there must be absolute singleness of purpose. If self-conscious readers and those lacking confidence in their reading practise reading to audiences, they will soon learn to concentrate on a poem with complete obliviousness to everything else. This single-minded concentration in reading to an audience is so important that no teacher of literature should neglect it.

For the middle forms the chief objectives at first might also be enjoyment of poetry and improvement in reading aloud. With many classes, measures to assist 'the suspension of disbelief' and possibly of other irrelevant or undesirable states of mind, may have to be planned and tried. When these are successful, the pupils will also need help in order to increase their understanding of the poems they study. By 'understanding' we here mean to include other responses besides the intellectual, such as the perception of the sounds of the words, of the rhythms, and of the auditory, visual and other images. For example, in order to *understand* Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind', the rhythms and sounds of the words need to become part of the

experience of imagining the wind: we have to be aware of the sound and the forceful rush of the wind in order to realize the urgency and the force of the poet's longing and desperate hope that the wind will

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!

So, too, the imagery of 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' does not embellish or illustrate the meaning, it expresses it, making it as if real to the mind; it does not illuminate, it makes imaginary facts precisely realizable. For without the imagery of this poem we should not properly feel the knight's distress, or the power of the beauty that enchained him, or the seasons, the dream, or the disillusionment. In effect, the meaning of the poem is carried almost completely by the imagery. So, in studying this poem with a class, the main task of the teacher, while making sure that the listening ear of each pupil is attending to sound and rhythm, is to keep minds imaginatively aware of the details; not of course at this stage discussing the imagery as part of the poet's poetic skill, though a descriptive detail suggested by a pupil might be the spark to fire someone's imagination.

We may note that any focus on detail should keep the image in its context, and must keep to the order in which the images occur in the poem. This is necessary because the architecture of the poem takes our thought, feeling and imagining along a path that was planned by the poet, and which leads us to the concluding line which seals its unity. The pause on an image is simply to observe detail accurately and to allow it full play. The demands that the greater poems make on us as readers impose an exacting discipline on our thinking and imagining; and it is the precision and vitality of this discipline that give them

such value to us; although many people do not realize the strictness and the stringency of a full appreciation of great works of art; and some underestimate the experience and training that are necessary for a discriminating appreciation of great art.

It follows that the only way to help our pupils to read with feeling, either aloud or silently to themselves, is to train them to keep their minds on the imagery and on the words that call it up, not forgetting that even though much of the imagery of poetry is visual, it is not photographic, but is visual in a swift intuitive way, 'tis here . . . 'tis gone': it is to be caught on the wing, not impaled by a partisan. Similarly, discussing the 'mood of the poem' with children will not help them to respond with sincere feeling; for the mood of a poem is engendered only by the imagination that keeps faithfully to the content of the poem, and that is being worked on by the poet's words—their meaning, sounds and rhythms. Therefore no analysis of the images or naming of figures of speech will be of any avail. The images are there to be imagined, not picked out, named, described, classified. Harping on this may seem uncalled-for; but every one of those procedures was in use formerly as the approved way of studying poetry; and in education 'the good old ways' linger on (even when they are not so good), for they have an indomitable perseverance. Sometimes even now they are commended, and occasionally recommended; merely to tolerate them by remaining silent would not be justifiable.

There is, on the other hand, often some good reason why one or more of these ways of dealing with imagery is adopted: it is difficult to know exactly what to do with images, especially when in a poem they are strongly expressive. A teacher realizes their importance, he knows his pupils should not pass over them, or respond to them

as if they were concepts: he therefore draws attention to them, perhaps tearing them out of their context. But the fine threads of poetry are so closely interwoven that we must not think, when we tear a piece away, that the design of the fabric is not left in tatters.

The facts are simple: pictorial imagery is to be visualized, auditory imagery to be listened to with the mind (as in 'Wee, sleekit, cow'ring, tim'rous beastie'), motor or kinaesthetic imagery is to be felt 'on the pulses', that is, as imagined movement (as in 'Thou need na start awa' sae hasty', spoken with sharp vowels and consonants as by a Scot), and with the imagery of warmth ('An' cozie here'), or of piercing cold ('... the winter's sleety dribble An' cranreuch cauld'), or of lightness ('It's silly wa's the win's are strewin' '). We have to sense them imaginatively with exactitude. It is this faithful *accuracy*—needing faith in the poet's words and their fine precision—that is the teacher's special concern.

The underlying purpose of the teacher in the study of poetry will normally be to help his pupils to find more in a poem than they could be aware of by themselves, and as the course proceeds, to train them to understand and appreciate poetry more fully and more perceptively. But pupils in the lower forms ought not to be urged to find everything possible in the poems they read; for them, the enjoyment of hearing and speaking a poem well will often be sufficient; sometimes perhaps a few revealing questions will stimulate their imaginations to respond more exactly and more appropriately. With middle forms more attention to the poet's words will be expected; and usually may be fostered by challenging questions, as, for example, 'There's something in line three that no one has mentioned, what is it?'—'There's a word in the last line that seems important to me: which is it, and why may it be important?'

—‘What do you think this word contributes to the poem?’

But with the upper middle and the senior forms, the work will become more scholarly, though the change from simple enjoyment should be very gradual; for there is no special necessity to attempt to make school children scholarly in their appreciation of poetry before they have had ample experience of a wide range of poetic expression, or before they have had a thorough training in poetry appreciation on increasingly exact lines. It may be best to keep to a simple study of poetry in this training until the last year or last two years, and then to change the nature of the work considerably by demanding a scholarly study of a few of the great poems, and of the work of two or three of the major poets. Thus the main objective until this last year or so would be wide reading and a varied experience of poetry; but not a thorough knowledge of every poem read, though there seems to be no valid reason why a few poems could not be studied as fully as the capabilities of a class allowed. In this wide reading, as is generally agreed, a sound understanding of most of the poems read will be a subsidiary objective, but without an intensive analysis of meaning, or any attention to literary form, prosody or the place of a poem in a history of literature.

For the senior pupils it will be the teacher's aim to provide for many and varied poetic experiences and to train them to respond to poetry appropriately; for example, with some classes he will have to change their outlook and habit of finding in poetry an easy satisfaction and a facile enjoyment. He may have to introduce them to poems of power and passionate feeling, such as ‘Batter my heart . . .’ and ‘Not, I'll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast on thee’ of Hopkins; and perhaps he must train them to perceive that these have more illuminating power in them

than have those poems whose best quality is the sweet music of their lines. But when he is questioning his pupils, he should often include 'And what more?'—'Is there anything else?'—'There's yet another important point'—for this training must especially aim at fostering the pupils' responses and their ideas about poetry, however crude these may be at first. But any over-hasty setting pupils right may rebuff the frankness of their responses; it would therefore be better to go on probing, encouraging, questioning, rather than to shut down the training by giving away the answers.

We have to remember always, especially when teaching less well-endowed pupils, that the purpose of the work is not to provide information about poetry, and not primarily even to secure the precise understanding of a poem; it is training *pupils*—training them in the poetic discipline. We are concerned with the growth of the human being in mind and spirit, in wisdom and mental stature—with the Humanities, not with Poetry for Art's sake.

We shall find that pupils in upper middle and the senior forms are often interested mainly in the content of a poem—what the poet has thought, his reaction to life, and especially his philosophy, rather than in the quality of the words and other elements of form. Nevertheless, their grasp of the content should be built on an accurate response to the words, and to all that the *form*, which includes rhythm and sound, expresses or suggests. Therefore the careful attention to sight, sound, rhythm and the other physical qualities of the words, that was begun in earlier years, must usually be continued in the training for the seniors.

To take an example: during the study of Burns's 'To a Field Mouse', comments might be invited on the line 'Has cost thee mony a weary nibble': we should then

expect some remark on the dragging sound of 'weary' being in contrast to the tiny nimble sounds of 'nibble'; and perhaps a comment on the special quality of the words in the line, supporting, by their sounds and rhythms, a precise expression of the sense. This kind of focus on single lines, and occasionally on single words, should come only when a class is going through the poem, so that what is examined more closely will be seen in its proper place in the continuous flow of the thought. With the seniors especially, even more than with juniors, the order of the verses and the lines of the poem must be kept to, and not disarranged: otherwise, how can the continuity and the important unity of the poem make their effect?

We have referred to questions a number of times, and must make clear their purpose in the later stages. They are not asked in order to elicit information from the class. Their purpose is to help the pupils to see more in a poem than they would perceive by listening, reading silently, or through their own silent reading and study. They are intended to sharpen perception, to awaken the imaginative eye, and to help the mind's ear to be aware of the music and expressive sounds of the words; and to help each reader to identify himself more fully with the poet, or with the characters in a dramatic poem. The questions, therefore, need careful selection and often very careful wording, for it is not easy always to prevent them from starting up unexpected hares, or from beguiling a class along irrelevant lines of enquiry.

As the work through the year progresses, the purpose of questions will change: from helping pupils to imagine more vividly, they now should direct pupils' attention to significant points, or to help them to think more deeply about the meaning, or to discover the fuller associations that a word, image or reference contributes to a poem.

The kind of question that is especially valuable here is the one that lights up the meaning. For example, in 'La Belle Dame' the knight's realization of what has happened to him is brought about by what he sees in his dream: 'death-pale were they all'—'their starved lips'; but for a reader to feel the true tragedy, he must know something of the romantic ideals of The Round Table, and of the solemn vows that were sworn, relating these to the knight's enthrallment. But as so many children nowadays are deprived of all that Malory can give them, it would usually be necessary to ask such a question as: 'What ideal did the knight-at-arms represent?'—Or 'Why was he so distressed when he realized he had fallen under the enchantment of "a faery's child"?'

It might be a sound rule never to ask a question unless it had a special purpose; for a class ought not to feel that it is being cross-examined, or that questions follow one another so rapidly that snap answers are wanted, and that fine discrimination is unnecessary. Though it would be far worse to ask questions for unaesthetic purposes, such as questions to find out if the class had 'understood' a poem, or to ask the even more ill-informed question 'Did you like that poem?'—ill-informed, and also unnecessary, for every teacher of intelligence knows at once whether or not his pupils have liked the poem he has just read to them.

The principle that only what is relevant to the poem should be admitted into a lesson is a good one; but this is not such an easy principle to follow as might be supposed, though teachers of experience know that it is a sound, though an austere, guide. Some classes develop the habit of asking irrelevant questions so that a teacher of such a class will not be able to follow the principle closely; he must be careful not to allow, or call for, free and random

questions *from* a class while a poem is being studied; and by 'free' we mean free to bring up any point whatsoever that is connected with poetry, or is distinctly related to the poem being read; but this practice is seldom used by teachers of experience, unless the poetry lesson is with a class that does not take kindly to poetry.

One of the reasons why it is advisable to damp the pretended curiosity of idle or red-herring questioners is that the class may be experimenting to find out if the bait will be taken, or how far or how long the experiment can go on; but there is also the fact that there is such a variety of points, ideas, opinions, references, that may relate to the poems that are studied in class, and that may be relevant in one way or another to the pupils' enjoyment and appreciation. The obvious difficulty is to select points that would be helpful in increasing the appreciation of a particular class. But by keeping a particular class in mind and the particular needs of the pupils, the problem of selecting the most helpful becomes not quite so puzzling; but when those points of greater relevance and helpfulness have been chosen, it is necessary to be drastic in discarding the rest of them. We are always faced with the obdurate fact that there will not be time in the single lesson to do everything, or even everything we think is essential: selection is forced on us, and perhaps that is just as well.

In this matter of relevance, which has been referred to, though pupils in the upper forms, and perhaps in middle forms, should be encouraged to seek for deeper meanings in poetry, they should not usually go beyond what is actually expressed in a poem, or travel far away from a poem in seeking to elucidate the contribution of a reference. For if the poet did not express in his poem something that is clearly related to it, it could not have been important to the development of his theme or expressive of

it; and therefore it should not be brought to light when the study of the poem is intended to foster appreciation. Of course, if the aim is a study of the poet's mind and life, or some similar topic, this would not apply. The importance of strict relevance in appreciation might with advantage be explained to an active-minded class, or to one that liked to range far and wide at the slightest provocation; and it certainly should be discussed with the class that has been allowed, perhaps encouraged, to propose any and every thing that comes to mind in studying a poem, or that is likely to get the speaker into the limelight. We need to be strict in this matter, for a disciplined relevance is a prime virtue in true appreciation; and the more we can focus attention on the words of a poem and on the experience it offers, the more valuable will the poem be to our pupils.

Finally, we must consider why the enjoyment of poetry has been selected as the general objective for lower forms, and why it has been referred to so often in these two chapters. It will be obvious to all that where there is no interest, the responses of a class to a poem and to questions on it are automatic, cursory or merely to please: it follows then that the special values that poetry has for children cannot come into play. We can go farther and state with conviction that pupils who are not interested, or who dislike poetry, do not participate in a poetic experience if they do not willingly attend—the *poetry* passes them by. They read words or hear them; but they may be deaf to their music; they gather ideas from the reading, but their minds, mirror-hard, reflect these and have no feeling for them—they find no pleasure in any 'leaf-fring'd legend' and do not imagine it *haunting* any Attic shape: how could a 'silent form' inspire anyone's imagination to delighted activity or one's thought to deep gnostic wisdom? Where interest is lacking, imagination wilts.

The appreciation of any art requires the open mind that is readily receptive to what is to be communicated. To receive, one needs to be 'in tune' with the medium that the artist uses, even, for example, 'feeling' supple movement in rigid stone. Therefore the first all-important task of the teacher is to win over his pupils to a willing, and if possible to an eager, receptiveness. Therefore 'enjoyment' is not purely hedonistic; it is the necessary accompaniment to aesthetic appreciation and to a full poetic experience: that is, as full as the young readers or listeners are capable of at that stage. Not only is it the necessary accompaniment, but also the evidence that at least some appreciation has been achieved. Pupils' enjoyment therefore is to be sought confidently and ardently, for it is the guarantee that the poem has brought to a pupil a peculiarly valuable experience, often with spiritual and moral values that we cannot estimate, or perhaps even understand. Did not Plato say: 'What is beautiful is a kind of father to what is good',¹ and did not Longinus add to this: 'Beauty of language is the proper light of the mind',² and Shelley so much later, relating poetry to our daily lives: 'The great instrument of moral good is the imagination.'³

Let him on a certain day read a certain page of full Poesy or distilled Prose, and let him wander with it, and muse upon it, and reflect upon it . . . and dream upon it.

KEATS: *Letter to John Hamilton Reynolds* (19 February 1818).

¹ *Hippias Major*.

² *On the Sublime*.

³ *A Defence of Poetry*.

XVIII

A TRAINING IN ELEMENTARY CRITICISM

He that will seek for a Pearl must first learn to know it when he sees it, lest he neglect it when he finds it, or make a nought-worth pebble his Jewel.

THOMAS NASHE: *The Anatomy of Absurditie.*

WE often hear the complaint, more frequently in late years: 'We teach them to read—and they choose comics!' The ripost to that is: 'But of course you *don't* teach them to read—not what you'd really call *read*!' For to teach 'them' to read there must be adequate training in exact reading, in finding information in print, in thinking that is stimulated and fed by the reading matter, *and* in addition there has to be some training in judgment—in assessing the quality of the material read: then, and perhaps only then, can we say our pupils have learnt to read.

Merely to be able to make sense of what is in print is a skill to be acquired in primary education, before the age of seven or eight. So we have at least eight years for training these other skills, and we should be able in those years to teach our pupils really to read, with an alert intellect, an awakened imagination and fairly steady judgment—if we buckled down to the task.

But what should be done to train secondary school pupils to discriminate between good writing and bad is debatable. That something should be done, even with the least literary minded pupils, is generally agreed; and, judging

from first-hand observation of various pupils' responses, we can say with some confidence that a training in critical analysis should be left as late as possible, except with the very intelligent pupils. It is evident, too, that most classes need to discover, and to be able to recognize, what is good in writing before they begin to look intentionally for what is bad.

It is likely that those who confidently set out to train pupils' judgment and critical appreciation often make use of exercises in criticism too low down in the school. They do not perhaps realize that most pupils in secondary schools to-day need considerable experience of reading good literature before critical analysis begins, and that it is essential to develop first a reliable recognition of good quality in description, dialogue, delineation of character, etc. When pupils begin this kind of work too early, they learn to pick out bad writing; but too often label as bad the writing that is new to them, or that is not fully understood, or that holds no interest for them. Sometimes it leads them to read and listen to poetry with minds closed to any creative imagining and to temporary imaginative belief. Sometimes it is impossible for young pupils, except the very intelligent, to feel confident in recognizing the good; for they soon realize that some of the passages for criticism are selected because they are poor; and they play for safety.

Three suggestions are proposed: first, in much of this training in criticism, it would be best to go very slowly, and to use very simple exercises at the beginning; for it is inadvisable to force an immature judgment. Second, a full training might be given only to pupils who are interested in poetry, and whose appreciation of literature is established on sound lines. Third, as the ability to judge between good and less good literature is developed by

wide reading and authentic appreciation, reading for enjoyment and simple appreciation should continue as an essential part of this training in criticism; for it is surely most inadvisable to put one's whole faith in critical studies, and to neglect further reading. For further wide reading is *necessary* in order to lay a sound foundation for the reliable exercise of a critical judgment: it is the only way to establish good standards and to bring into play an intuitive sense of what is good—or bad.

But whatever critical training is planned, it should be made more exacting gradually, not suddenly become full of difficulties. At first, the choice of good or bad should be fairly obvious, and if possible indisputable, so that the pupils' powers of appreciating the best will not be shadowed by the fear of 'being taken in', or by their determination not to miss a single weakness or blemish; for to some pupils criticism becomes a treasure-hunt in reverse. With many classes it may be best to delay any suggestions of a critical attitude of mind until the last year, for the conceptions of poetry held by very many pupils will often be too immature for this scrupulous work.

The general purpose of the first part of this training might well be to build up a sound body of thought about poetry. With some classes this will already have been done; but with others it may be necessary to work over their ideas and convictions about poetry and why poets write poetry, and perhaps about the value of poetry to us. Indeed, sometimes this must be done, because children get hold of such queer ideas about poetry, and often retain until their sixth year quite childish conceptions about it that they picked up when very young. It may therefore be necessary to deal firmly with the belief that the purpose of poetry is solely to teach moral truths, or merely to tell a story, or to present 'pictures' to the mind, especially of

'the beauties of Nature'. Then again, some pupils will believe that poetry is suitable only for mild recreation in idle hours. So, too, pupils' ideas about imagery, figures of speech, alliteration, etc., very often have to be corrected, or developed. For instance, metre and rhythm are often confused, figures of speech are regarded as embellishments: their purpose in expression is not realized, and their *necessity*—to express meaning precisely and truthfully—is not perceived. Alliterations and other expressive sounds that a poet uses to affect our imagination are disposed of as 'pretty sound effects' or as merely ornamental (as of course they sometimes are). They are not attended to as *sound*, but as cognitive items.

With better informed classes it may be advisable to discuss the misconception that there are 'poetical subjects' and a special 'poetic language'. With some, a reading of poems to illustrate the opposite view will be sufficient, such poems as Sidney's 'Thou blind man's mark', and Donne's 'Spit in my face' will be effective, though these may be too mature for some pupils. With other classes, it will be necessary to discuss the idea that poems are to be studied only because they reveal poets' minds, motives, passions, beliefs; though these 'minor' meanings, properly considered, may contribute to an appreciation of a poem; but senior pupils should not be left with the idea that appreciating poetry is mainly a biographical or autobiographical investigation—or an excursion into psychology.

Misconceptions can often be quickly dealt with; but sometimes they must be 'thrashed out' with a class, for some senior pupils can be very 'stiff in opinion', though not necessarily 'always in the wrong'. In these discussions it is essential for pupils to be frank and open, and in the interests of truth and sincerity to air their doubts, their

likes and dislikes honestly. Through confession, their fellows' arguments and beliefs, and the teacher's socratic questioning, they may arrive at ideas that they can accept, such as that works of art are valuable as 'experience', if for no other reason, and especially as experience that is fully and vividly expressed, and, by being expressed, brought to a successful completion. Or a slow class may catch a glimpse of the fact that a poem has value for its own sake, presenting us with an expression of thought and feeling that is perfect in form.

At some point after discussion of this kind, it will be opportune to explain the necessity for the contemplation of a work of art. The poem, picture, architecture, should become part of the observer's treasured experience, and should sink deep into his consciousness; so it must be lived with, returned to again and again, meditated on. It must be so closely attended to that it will absorb all of his conscious mind. Senior pupils should know this, and also that most of us need practice in order to achieve complete absorption in a great work of art, as well as training in imaginative concentration and sensitive response. Later may come reflection on the experience and on the expression of it; but first the poem must be allowed free play with us (not merely a fair hearing) with single sovereignty and full rights—when it has the power to exert these.

It is best, no doubt, with most classes to move very slowly towards *specific* exercises in criticism, and to keep most of the earlier study on fairly general lines. Simply to encourage 'talk' is often a good plan, and to get 'preferences' proposed and justified; because the whole time in this work we must build on the pupils' ideas, beliefs and experience, and on their genuine responses to poetry, not on what they *should* be thinking. We need to move slowly at their rate of growth, and *with* their develop-

ment, not far in advance of it. Next may come perhaps some gentle probing: 'Do you think it is worth reading again?'—after silent reading; and on poems that the pupils have known for some time: 'Why do you think it has arrested your attention for so long?'—'What in the poem especially attracts you?'—'What is there in it that suggests it is true poetry?' For a poem that the class had doubts about: 'Has it *any* distinction?—Any distinct quality—of word, sound, rhythm, imagery?'

Whenever a class is nonplussed or undecided about a poem, a question on some detail will usually help them: 'What about the subject?—the wording?—the rhythm?' Or 'Has it any vividness, any realism, any originality?' Or 'What particular force has this word—the word "proud", for instance, in "Death be not proud"?' The question 'Is there a change of theme, or any unexpected turn of thought in the poem?' will help some classes in their study of certain poems. But with the slower pupils simple questions like 'Who is speaking?'—'Who is being addressed?'—'Is there a second speaker or someone imagined as listening or replying?' must sometimes be asked in order to give the readers the help they need to grasp what is being communicated.

As to method, when in this training the pupils have a new poem in front of them and have to assess its quality, the first thing they should do is to test the poem by their own reading of it. It must be read aloud—that is essential, and at home might be best. Then without coming to a decision (we hope), they should read it over again; and if they can be persuaded to do so, yet again; though it would be better if they would wait for a week, and then read it again aloud to themselves. Ideally then, and not until then, the questions should be asked: 'What is being communicated?'—'What is the poet's intention?'—'What

is the quality of the experience that is presented to us?' In the repeated reading the pupil's individual sensitiveness is brought into play and trained: this is more valuable to him than answering the questions. For time and repetition help him to discover that the poem can still hold him and still delight him—or that it cannot; and the repeated tests of reading are needed for him to be aware of the complete poem and to discern its value. But whether one's pupils will try this method, and have faith in it, is another thing. Explanation of why all this is worthwhile, and some persuasion to experiment in this way on themselves, and test their growing power of judging may catch their interest; but at any rate they should know that their own reactions to poetry, untrammelled by 'oughts' or reasons, are a legitimate guide to a sound discrimination—provided they have read a good deal of poetry.

Often the most effective method to use is that of comparison, as it is more definite and decisive than any other. It also admits of variety and a suitable range of difficulty, so that one can select obviously good and bad poems for immature pupils. With the older ones a poet's early version compared with a late one can provide simple and definite training in taste and judgment. After practice with contrasted poems or verses, an intelligent class could compare a poet's early and later poems; obvious examples suggest themselves: Tennyson, Hopkins, Keats. It might be best not to encourage general talk in this later work, but to have short written comparisons drawn up by individuals, or by small groups, and to have some of these discussed at the end of the lesson.

Another definite exercise in this training is the arranging of a number of lines, verses or passages in order of preference or of a selected quality; it is an exercise that the least gifted can attempt with some hope of success. Examples

can be arranged, for instance, according to rhythm: first would come the lines that expressed the delicate movements of things with subtle rhythms, and the last would be those that had a monotonous and mechanical rhythm. Or the grading might be according to whether the imagery was merely illustrative or was intrinsically expressive. Again, it would seem best to end the lesson with ample discussion of the results, with comparisons of as many pupils' lists as possible.

The idea of putting a number of test questions to each line or verse is also easy and definite, and it interests the more literal-minded pupils. For those who find this work puzzling, it would be best to classify the questions in such categories as rhythm, imagination, emotion, sound, and to question only on one or two. Thus on rhythm one might ask: 'Has the line (or verse) a general-purpose, unvaried rhythm, or a varied and supple one?' Or 'Is the rhythm slick, expected, noticeable, or is it gentle and unobtrusive?' Examples for study before the 'unseens' were given out might be 'The Destruction of Sennacherib', and on the opposite scale almost any poem by Hopkins or any verse of 'The Ancient Mariner'.

The questions on Imagination would have to be less definite, so at first the exercise would best be arranged with examples in pairs: for instance, 'How much is left to the imagination in the first verses of "La Belle Dame" compared with those of "The Lady of Shalott"?'—'Is more imaginative attention required in reading Keats's "Ode to Melancholy" or Shelley's "Ozymandias"?'—Or, more simply, 'Do the images demand merely acquiescence, or must the reader put forth an unwonted imaginative effort in, say, "In Belgium's capital was gathered there" from *Childe Harold*, and Hopkins' "When kingfishers catch the fire"?' More advanced pupils could go on to estimate the

different quality of imaginative effort, say in reading epic similes in *Sohrab and Rustum*, *Paradise Lost*, *The Faerie Queene*, *The Seasons*; or, later, answer the question: 'Which poems demand the closest imaginative attention: Gray's *Elegy*, Hopkins' "The Windhover", Bridges' "Nightingales", Browning's "Childe Roland . . ."?'

Advanced classes that showed true discrimination in some of the earlier exercises that have been described, or in similar work, could perhaps apply suggestions, gathered from the critics, to the poems which appeared to be genuine poetry. For example, they could take Stephen Potter's 'With the true Maker, one is conscious that words are being used, filled with a new kind of life',¹ and, having read the poem, possibly three times, they might ask themselves: 'Was I conscious that the words were being used in a special way?'—'Was I aware that they were filled with a new kind of life, as I am, for instance, when I read Donne's "I wonder by my Troth", or "Who ever comes to shroud me"?' Or they might take F. R. Leavis's 'Poetry can communicate the actual quality of experience with a subtlety and precision unapproachable by any other means' from his *New Bearings in English Poetry*, and ask themselves concerning a poem: 'Am I just aware of the experience, or has the experience communicated to me by this poem some special quality?' Or 'Is the experience straight and unoblique, as is Byron's "The Dying Gladiator" in *Childe Harold*, or has it subtlety and precision, as can be enjoyed in Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress"?'

How far one can go in this training is a matter of experience, perhaps trial and error, and most certainly it will depend on intelligent, sensitive observation, and on reading the signs that in senior classes of boys will often be slight, transient and secretive, even when the training

¹ *The Muse in Chains*.

has been most successful. In such circumstances, discussion might bring things out into the open: 'What critical tenets *can* we apply?'—'What *are* the principles of criticism?'—'Can we trust our own personal experience of poetry—our intuitions—or do we also need our intelligence to get to work to provide reasons and evidence for our judgments?'—Having gone so far, some of the class will undoubtedly be reading Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie*, Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, Wordsworth's *Prefaces to the Lyrical Ballads*, Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*, or possibly Hopkins's *Letters*. Profitable discussion would then centre on such convictions as Coleridge's: That 'the property of poetry . . . can be no other than the property of exciting a more continuous and equal attention than the language of prose aims at, whether colloquial or written'; and ' . . . the objects which he [Shakespeare] presents . . . burst upon us at once in life and in power';¹ or on Hopkins's 'One of two kinds of clearness one should have—either the meaning to be felt without effort as fast as one reads or else, if dark at first reading, when once made out *to explode*.'²

To do the Eurydice any kind of justice you must not slovenly read it with the eyes but with your ears.

G. M. HOPKINS: *Letter XL to Robert Bridges*.

. . . not the poem which we have read, but that to which we return, with the greatest pleasure, possesses the genuine power and claims the name of essential poetry.

S. T. COLERIDGE: *Biographia Literaria*.

¹ *Biographia Literaria*, XV.

² Letter LXIII.

XIX

DRAMA

The text of a play is a score waiting performance, and the performance and its preparation are, almost from the beginning, a work of collaboration.

H. GRANVILLE-BARKER: *Prefaces to Shakespeare's Plays.*

TO some people, 'drama' means *reading* plays, although reading is reading, whatever is being read—trash or tragedy, and children at school receive the same benefits in reading lively dialogue in a novel as they will in *reading* plays. Actors, producers, and those who read plays as plays, see in the mind's eye the characters of the play speaking and moving as in real life; but because we cannot rely on school children to read plays like that, the acting of plays in classroom, school hall, and when possible in the open air, should be recognized as the natural and necessary form of drama in school. For an acted play has an exceptional value for school children, especially those who are developing rapidly and maturing early. When they identify themselves with the characters in a play, when the words and thoughts and feelings of these characters become their words and thoughts and feelings, and when they express these in movement—that is, when the children *are acting*, however feebly or crudely—they are receiving the exceptional benefit that drama has for them.

We must understand that the medium for drama is the human personality, not the printed word; and it is the human personality in a context of imagined reality; not

in an imagined story as told by a narrator. On the contrary, the story is presented and acted out by the characters of the story *themselves* (impersonated by the actors). All this is obvious; but whenever 'Drama' or the 'Shakespeare' period comes round, it is too often forgotten, with the consequence that a class will read a play (often with delightful expression), but never see it or hear it or *live* in it with their own personalities, their own bodily expression. This is not to deny that there is much value in reading plays, but *that* value is not the value of dramatic representation by the pupils themselves.

It is this experience of impersonating a character that is so important—of being that character imaginatively in word and thought and deed, and of making contact with other characters, and of participating in action and social complications with them. These experiences of thinking the thoughts of other minds, of feeling other emotions than his own, and of expressing these in action that is activated by the motives of the characters in a play, carry the pupil beyond his own self-interest and his desire to gain his own ends: they help him to understand and feel and think in another world, even though it is but a make-believe one. They enable the more thoughtful and enquiring pupils to see human beings more objectively than is ordinarily possible; and thereby to understand themselves and those with whom they come in contact. On this point W. P. Ker wrote: 'No man ever gave away to another or made allowance for him without being something of a dramatist; dramatic imagination enters into every question of justice. How can you understand other people's motives unless you act out a fragment or two of a play in which they are characters?'¹

This imaginative identification of self with characters

¹ *Imagination and Judgment.*

in a play enables the adolescent approaching maturity to understand something of the problems that adults face, and the difficulties they meet with in trying to carry out what they want to do. It enables the senior pupils to become aware of the complexity of human nature, its goodness as well as its evil. And when there is identification with the characters in the great plays, there is far greater value, for great drama gives the mind rich food for thought, it deepens sympathies, heightens understanding, and stimulates generous feelings of appreciation for what is good and of special value.

As drama relies so much on the spoken word for its existence, we must look to the dialogue to discover the essence and the quality of a play. The dialogue reveals so much—characters, motives, thoughts, time, place and action—that we can find in it almost the whole of the situation, social and dramatic, in which the characters are seen; as, for example, when the serving men of two great and rival houses are quarrelling in the street. In dialogue, too, we shall find tension heightened or slackened, pace quickened or purposefully slowed up, and the violence of the action increased or curbed—*Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Lear* and *Coriolanus* are especially full of examples of these changes in tempo, intensity and rhythm that are demanded by the dialogue. It is therefore the dialogue that is especially important for school children: 'When it comes to staging the plays, the speaking of the verse must be the foundation of all study.'¹

This special importance for children is that, whenever a play is being acted, if only in a small classroom, the actor-pupils are for once using language that is unusually expressive and significant. This language also disciplines their minds, for in fulfilling the demands of situation,

¹ H. Granville-Barker: *Prefaces to Shakespeare's Plays*.

action, characterization, they are obeying the dictates of the words. And what is so valuable to them, is that they are using language that is fitted, as so rarely for them, to action, situation, character. They are using language that is expressing, fully and richly, what they have in mind (or should have in mind). Thus they are having experience of thinking, feeling and acting in new and vital situations and events, and at the same time having experience of speaking language expressive of their thoughts, feelings and their action in these situations. These language experiences are especially appropriate and valuable, in proportion to the greatness of the dramatist.

We see, then, that in acted plays, the children are speaking in a realistic situation the kind of language that, all through their English course, we are trying to train them to speak: language that is appropriate, expressive, significant. We realize the value of this when we reflect on the language and thoughts that habitually pass through the minds of a large majority of our pupils—the clichés, the slang of the day, the short-cuts in expression, the half-formulated impression or idea, the routine comments and conventional remarks, all of which make up much of the normal conversation among equals and near-equals of school communities; and when we listen critically to the casual language of everyday life, we realize the great value of the language of Shakespeare's plays at its best.

In a play expressive and significant language is readily to hand: in a moment our pupils can use this vital, taut language, merely by getting into a part and letting the words of a character be their words, the thoughts and feelings their own thoughts and feelings, the motives and actions theirs to express and reveal. This is the finest linguistic education we can provide: in this our pupils' language abilities are being trained and disciplined, and

they are being practised in using language of a particular excellence. The critics extol the wonders of Shakespeare's language; but educationists have neglected to point out that, if our pupils are to learn to use language effectively, this is the language that ought *constantly* to be flowing through their minds—and for as many years as possible.

We must emphasize the point, especially to young teachers and non-specialists teaching English, that the words of the great dramatists should frequently *occupy* the minds of senior pupils, so that our pupils will become aware of, and be at home with, truly expressive language: their standards, their thinking and their imagining *need* this language, and though they will rarely use such language, they must be able to appreciate its qualities. Its greatest value to their growing mental powers is that, by thinking thoughts that are expressed effectively, their own thinking, and their consequent command of language are extended and invigorated.

These great values of drama for educating children, for improving their language and their thinking, for developing their sympathies, their powers of appreciation and sense of values, for increasing control of themselves and their speaking, for promoting self-confidence, poise and a natural ease of manner, and especially for training the imagination, can be attained only when the pupils are deeply absorbed in a play. Therefore drama cannot become the unique educational instrument it should be, if plays are studied only to be 'known', that is, if the pupils gain little more from their study than a knowledge of the characters, plot and structure, and if the language to them is only blank verse to be 'understood'—intellectually. This is a hard statement, and many teachers will find it unacceptable; but we are not attacking and decrying knowledge and understanding, we are emphasizing something

else that is of far greater value for most *school children*. The emphasis is on the value of the play for what it really is—a play to be acted, and *thus* to become a living work of art: living, because it is brought into being by living people, and because it presents a portrait of life as in a mirror.

The value of acted plays for young school children's personal development and growth of mind and character, clearly, is more important for our pupils *at this stage of their lives* than that they should have a full knowledge of a play or be trained in sound scholarship. Scholarship is for the university and for the teacher; but growth, activity and stimulating expression are the urgent need of school children; though habits of good scholarship can be instilled during the last year or last two years of school.

Thus a play is to be a re-creation of character and situation, action and reaction, with pupils playing the parts, as 'one man in his life plays many parts'. They will be 'merely players', for these plays can best be appreciated, and indeed best *understood*, when they are being brought into existence by the living personalities of child-actors. Boy-actors have done this from the sixteenth century onwards; and girl-actors have shown that they can play-act just as delightfully as the boys; in fact, in speech and movement, carriage and imagination, they can equal the boys whenever their confidence and enthusiasm are aroused, and they can carry off the male parts just as brilliantly as the boys do the women's; they have the advantage—they do not have to learn the graceful manipulation of skirts and petticoats.

Boys and girls in a classroom, then, 'doing a play of Shakespeare', are not scholars, poring over their books: they are actors. They are not even studying literature: they are bringing a play into being. The play has to come

into existence so that they can see it and hear it as a living reality, not as words on the page. This is essential for most pupils, so that they can realize, even imperfectly, its essence and its true quality. A reading of a play by a class is like their studying the music score of a song at their desks; only when they stand up and sing is there a song for all to enjoy. Just because the words are in print does not mean that the play is to be treated like a novel or dramatic poem. The print is the score, the prompt-copy. A great novel is to be read—silently; but the essential medium of drama is the spoken word—actors on the city stages *speak* their lines, they do not read them! '*Speak* the speech, I pray you' our playwright would say to us now—with a new and even more urgent meaning.

The confusing of drama with literature has prevented many a class from getting the best possible to them from a Shakespeare play; yet if a teacher wishes to have *literary* values appreciated by his pupils in reading and studying a play, he should not be criticized adversely for his choice; and what magnificent literature Shakespeare's plays can provide, if they *are* to be treated as literature—what varied action, what searching penetration of motive and mind, of character and emotion, laid bare instantaneously for our imagining, or stamped forcibly on our minds and memories! And what language!—'*Trippingly on the tongue*'—'*Do not saw the air*'!—'*Up from my cabin, my sea-gown scarfed about me, Groped I to find them out*'! It is no wonder that many teachers treat this vivid, vivacious stuff as literature, and small blame to them; for regarded as literature it is nothing less than great literature. But they should not, in their enthusiasm for the potency of this language, hoodwink themselves that they are treating the plays as plays: they are treating them as dramatic literature. They are therefore missing the unique values that

only acted plays can have for us—even stumblingly in a classroom; and may they not, too, be missing some aesthetic quality, arising perhaps from the peculiarly graphic and naturalistic presentation of an acted play?

Surely there would be an upsurge of enthusiasm for drama if all plays, not only Shakespeare's, were treated in the classrooms of all pupils below the fifths or sixths in all types of school *as if* the intention was to produce the plays on a stage, even if actual production were usually impossible. The text in front of the pupil would then always be regarded simply as the actor's lines to enable him to take his part in reconstructing the play in real action and speech in front of the class. It is true that many small problems arise when this is done; but though some of these problems often loom large, if nothing is risked, nothing worthwhile may be achieved. In this undertaking—with some classes this adventurous experiment—we must not turn tail when the dangers of poor discipline, blundering speech, crude interpretation, inadequate knowledge, or 'the mangling of the play' make their entrances at one time or another on the stage; for once a class has caught the spirit of a play, these dangers appreciably diminish. At this point the objection may be raised: 'That's all very well, but what am I to *do*?'—A fair question, for that is the crux: how to begin? It is the beginning that is so important for the success of this work.

In the pupils' first year it is a wise plan to begin with Improvised Drama, for this is not only the best activity in English for beginners, but it also practises them in dramatic expression and in imagining themselves as various people, both of which will help later in appreciating Shakespeare. Improvised drama may seem uncontrolled and even childish to many teachers, but it has value. Pupils at this stage benefit in many ways if they can forget

their self-consciousness in moving and speaking in front of each other, for self-consciousness may be a distressing hindrance to the free growth of personality, and possibly a serious affliction. Children also have to learn to work and play together as a team, subordinating to a corporate undertaking their own individual interests and desires, which in some children are very strong. In doing this they enjoy the unconscious freedom from personal difficulties, the free activity of mind and body, and the very simple creative effort they are making. Enjoyment in classroom drama has its value too, for then the great demands that Shakespeare's plays will later make on the children need not be lopped and pruned; but may be given full scope, because their enjoyment will stimulate their efforts to achieve far more than they otherwise could.

Improvised drama can be based on the stories being read in class; but the best is usually achieved in dramatizing Robin Hood ballads, treasure and other island adventures, historical scenes, scenes from 'our village', from seaside and country, past and present, especially with a background of smugglers' caves, pirates' lairs and bandits' hideouts for the boys, though nowadays it is all spacemen and interplanetary exploration. With these exciting productions, much of the scene-planning, character-selecting, etc., can best be done in groups, but perhaps it would be better to call them 'Acting-companies'; and much of the writing will be done eagerly out of school. The presentation of the scenes in action and speech (or mime, if suitable) will put the dialogue and construction of the scene to the test—of interest, liveliness, dramatic quality; and often the teacher can safely leave the approval of the text, and the criticisms after the first acting, and perhaps after the second, to the keen wits of the class, even with slow 'streams'.

These improvised 'Medieval Interludes' acted by 'Classroom Guilds' will soon give place to provincial amateur theatrical societies putting on one-act plays, though the classroom will see only the first rehearsals. There are plenty of good playbooks with enough one-act plays to cover a year's or two years' acting and dramatic expression; and most of the books on drama in school are full of useful and sound suggestions; though in practice, if the first-year dramatic activities and adaptations have gone well, a good class will not need much help, and so can be given free rein. With these the best stimulus to improve speaking and action is both generous praise, where that can be sincere, and simple detailed comments on what was good. Many classes need egging-on and good-humoured encouragement to let themselves go; often with results that surprise them. It is indeed a happy experience sometimes to see how an individual or a group will produce authentic effects and true dramatic expression; and extraordinary, too, the self-confidence that this will engender. When results like these are evident, the exceptional value of drama for children can no longer be in doubt—if it ever was.

Classes that have done some successful classroom acting, even if only of dramatic scenes from a novel read during the previous year, will often look forward to their first Shakespeare play, especially if there is a tradition of good play-production in the school; a class may even *demand*, or rather repeatedly ask for, a Shakespeare play. A little stone-walling sometimes helps to whet appetite still further and to excite curiosity. When the time comes for a class to begin on Shakespeare, the play need not be read through before beginning any acting, as is very often thought necessary. It is better to let the plot unfold itself slowly *in action*, in this way holding back the satisfying of

impatient curiosity: 'What have we seen happening so far?'—'Now, let's see what happens next!'

The first lesson might then begin something like this: 'Open your books, Act I, Scene 1. Well, where are we?'—*P.* (pupil): 'In Rome, sir.'—'Yes, but where in Rome?'—*P.*: 'In a street.'—'Right, and who appears first?'—*P.*: 'Flavius and Marullus.'—'And who are they?'—*P.*: 'It doesn't say, sir.'—'Look in the list of the *Dramatis Personae*.'—*P.*: 'It says they're Tribunes. What was a tribune, sir?'—*P.*: 'I know, sir, he was a Trade Union Leader!'—*2nd P.*: 'No, he wasn't, was he, sir? He was more like a Police Superintendent.'—'Yes, in some ways; but all we need to know for the moment is that he was an official. We shall see him carrying out his duties, and find out more about them later. But what are these two tribunes doing here? Look at the first line. Why are they sending the men home?'—*P.*: 'They weren't allowed to walk about on a working day without a sign of their trade.' 'Good, now look farther down the page at Flavius's second speech, and then at the Second Commoner's reply. What are the tribunes really objecting to?'—*P.*: 'To the men taking a day off to celebrate Caesar's triumph.'—'Good, now read Marullus's speech, "Wherefore rejoice?"; and then we will sum up what the tribunes thought about this triumph.' . . . —*P.*: 'They are against Caesar, sir.'—'Now read through the rest of the scene to yourselves, and see what you can find out about the political situation in Rome.' . . . —*P.*: 'There are two parties, sir.'—'Right, what do we know about them?'—*P.*: 'The working people are for Caesar, and the tribunes against him.'—'What are the tribunes afraid of?'—*P.*: 'Of Caesar being a dictator, sir, and keeping them all "in servile fearfulness".'—'Good, always quote from the play whenever you can . . .' and so on, for the first half of the lesson.

Teacher: 'Now, back to the beginning. Our next problem is how to show some of this realistically. How can we show this holiday mood of the workmen and their determination to enjoy themselves, and then the antagonism of the opposing party? What suggestions?' The class then might make suggestions for the crowd and the heated interruption of the holiday-making by the two tribunes, which the commoners react to so saucily. The teacher could then urge the class on with further questions in order to get more exact details of action, posture, gesture, tone of voice, that will reveal the feelings of the crowd and the changing reactions of the tribunes. Finally, the teacher would say: 'Now let us try to make this opening scene a really lifelike and exciting clash between the two parties. Who shall we choose for Marullus? Who for Flavius? And who will make the cheekiest commoners? And we shall want plenty of others in order to show the excited crowds in the streets of Rome!' . . . 'Now, let us try it in front of the desks here!'

We need hardly repeat that these are not model questions; but merely examples to indicate in detail how a study of a scene might go, touching on the main theme, very simply and concretely, and leading the class on to imagine the characters moving realistically on the stage; and the teacher directing attention to the vital elements in the scene, impelling the pupils to search, read and find out for themselves what is important; and then re-orientating this for presentation on a stage. After some action and perhaps some simple grouping have in this way been prepared, and after another short period of silent reading of the scene, so that the actors will know roughly what they have to say, it is run through with as much action and impersonation as possible, though it may be presented at first only in a rather stiff and laboured way.

However, this presentation may then be discussed, and further suggestions for improvement criticized. Then perhaps another group might see what they can do with the same scene, maybe with more liveliness, though it will often be far from what a selected cast can do with it under proper coaching.

It is often a good plan to end this first period on a Shakespeare play, or to begin the second lesson, with a few remarks about the importance of relying on the words of the play for details about character, place, attitude, etc. and about the necessity for the actors to express the characters they are impersonating in simple, small movements, and in posture, physical attitude, tone of voice. Most pupils have to learn that they have to *reveal* the character to an audience, and that that can be done in little subtle ways, and that even a small part may be given individuality on the stage; but that forceful action and voice should be used when the words express strong feeling, as in the anger of 'What trade, thou knave? Thou naughty knave, what trade?', or in the abrupt annoyance of 'What meanest thou by that? Mend me, thou saucy fellow?'

To see how this leads on to the next lesson, we might illustrate a possible beginning: 'What have we learnt so far?'—*P.*: 'Some people are opposed to Caesar.'—'What do they want to do?'—*P.*: 'They want to stop him from having more power.'—'What shall we look for in Scene ii?'—*P.*: 'I know, sir! For one or two others who will side with the tribunes.'—'Good, open your books. We have met the workmen, now who is here?'—'And what do we learn from them?' . . . Thus, the dramatic threads of the previous lesson are spun into the new weave of the second scene, which is being prepared for presentation in action. In this way, scene by scene, the dramatic theme unfolds itself and mounts in tension as the crises appear; and all

is lived through as a personally imagined and verbally expressed experience, as far as that is possible for the pupils who are busily engaged in bringing the play to life; for it is the teacher's purpose to get the play as fully experienced as possible, not merely to have it understood. The more fully it is experienced, the more will the pupils enjoy it, and therefore the more will they put their hearts into it.

It is not possible to describe here some of the things that a teacher might do to make classroom acting effective, or how a complete play can be worked up in the classroom, or by trial and error be rehearsed on the school stage. But when pupils begin to think of the characters as real persons, and are determined to make their acting and speaking as convincing and as true to real life as they can, much of the classroom method becomes a matter of common sense, though an intuitive feeling for dramatic situation, and considerable patience, are useful assets too. One also needs the confidence and the insight that can put up with crude, blundering action until the play 'takes hold', and no doubt one needs in addition the long view that can accept, perhaps even encourage, a disruption of the traditional, neat-row tidiness of the classroom. These are well worth putting up with for the sake of the vastly more important interest, and for the sake of a play that is a living activity, and not a passive set of words in print.

It is because the great tragic themes of *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* are presented to us in the conversation of human beings, and through the speaking of real people, the actors, that the dialogue must never be 'stagey'. For example, in *Julius Caesar*, at the first meeting of Brutus and Cassius the conversation should be the natural conversation of two real men; they might, therefore, walk up and down part of the time, turning to one

another at vital points in the argument, talking *to* one another, or one pointedly turning to and addressing the other: they must show that they are real or rather behave as if they were real, not two stuffed togas. Suggestions, such as these, can be made by the pupils, of course, once they have perceived what is wanted. Time spent on collecting suggestions is time well spent, because direct instructions about the acting to economize time lead to stiffness and imitation; and if the acting is rough and ready and not really appropriate, we can accept it, as the pupils are not being trained to be actors, and the play is not to be presented in a public performance. The plan here is to encourage the pupils to find their own solutions in expressing character, feeling, motive, attitude.

It will be seen that usually pupils soon begin to feel at home on a school stage, or in front of a class in a small classroom. Even if there is very little space for grouping and movement, that does not matter, for the human body can be the most expressive instrument of all, and much can be indicated in subtle ways in a small compass, once a young actor has caught the idea, and the class enjoys his efforts. So, at the very first, the aim will usually be to get the young actors to feel easy and free when taking part in an acted scene; then later to loosen them up until they are flexible and nimbly mobile: it may well be best at first to leave them unchecked when they move too much; finer control can soon be learnt; but if they do not move at all, control of movement is impossible. At this point, the thing to aim at is to urge them to express *something* by their physical stance, position in relation to the other characters, etc., even if this is inadequate. Quite soon in this work, we should normally expect most of the cast to express some traits of the characters they are impersonating, though this will often be underdone. At the begin-

ning, therefore, the teacher needs to watch closely and to listen attentively in order to hear or see those slight indications in moving, voice or facial expression that will tell him that a pupil is getting into his part. These slight indications ought not to be passed over, but should perhaps be noted, and in the ensuing discussion commented on or simply recalled, so that they can be developed or adapted or more firmly expressed, or be used as an example to stimulate others to express character more fully and confidently.

Now, is it sufficient for a class below the middle of the school to achieve no more than has been roughly indicated here? For the first play of the year and the first Shakespeare play, it might be all that *can* be done. The pupils have begun to see the play as a living work, they have begun to enjoy the fun of producing a real play, and to enjoy their part in re-creating something. And if what they have produced is poor, even perhaps disorganized and insufficiently disciplined by the exact wording, the definite characterization and the obvious needs of situation and plot, at least they will have produced something, and they will have done that largely themselves; they have not sat like dummies or wide-eyed waxworks listening to their teacher reading the play (and enjoying *his* play!). Also they will not have been dragged through a laboured reading of the play, or a hardly-won comprehension of the text. By acting in it themselves, or by being producer, prompter, property-man, scene-shifter or the enviable 'effects' producer, they will *understand* the play as a play—and understanding is the first and the essential step to *knowing*. Exact and scholarly knowledge later will then have a firm and sound foundation.

Naturally, there are difficulties in any attempt to carry out suggestions such as these with some classes, and we

ought now to consider the least harmful modifications that a practising teacher may have to make; though without an actual class to prescribe for, suggestions must needs be rather general and tentative; indeed, this plea for plays to be acted has been put forward of necessity without reference at every point to particular classes. In the first place, it is well known that classes of very intelligent pupils, boys or girls, from about the age of fifteen do not 'take to' acting in front of a class. But if a strong tradition for acting plays can be established in the school, boys of fifteen and sixteen will readily co-operate in extempore acting; it would then be possible to have at least one play acted in the fourth year. This play should be successful, or perhaps just the most actable scenes in it, if the pupils have had ample acting experience in previous years. They would have had this if they had acted in one Shakespeare play in their second year (say, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Julius Caesar*—a better play to begin on with boys), and three plays in their third year (say, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Macbeth*, *The Rivals*, or *The Good-natured Man*). An intelligent third-year class can perform *The Tempest* with great enjoyment, and appreciation of some of its unique quality; but a class that has entered into the spirit of this kind of dramatic expression will make something of almost any play. If risks are taken, successes often follow.

There is of course always the chief hindrance to enduring and continuous work in literature and drama: the problem of *time*. For when the time-table allows only four periods a week for English to the First, Second and Third Forms, it shackles a teacher with leaden links: no one can feel free to teach a subject in the way it should be taught, if he is unduly cramped for time. Because of the importance of the subject and of the necessity for pupils to have a reasonable command of the language of instruction, five

periods a week are essential for the first three years. The subject cannot be taught adequately in less. We do not want merely to give our children *some* education; we want to give them the best that is possible; but to cut down their activities in dramatic work and the magnificent training in language that is provided by dramatic expression is to cut down the very thing that is most valuable to them at that stage. Dramatic expression is not so *urgent* for the fifths and sixths.

Now for the compromises. First, we can economize on time with the less intellectual classes by concentrating on scenes with the most physical action, and by 'cutting' drastically unimportant scenes, or leaving them to be read silently by those who will. Obviously, *The Merchant* will not suffer much from this treatment; *Macbeth* needs to be acted in full, or very nearly, but as it is so much shorter and has so rapid a tempo, especially in the last scenes, this should always be possible. In fact, all the strong claims we have made for drama, especially its unusually appropriate language and the illumination of the meaning of its words by action, grouping, posture, etc., apply so much *more* to scenes such as Antonio's first meeting with Shylock, or as the first meeting of Macbeth with the witches, than to many of the minor scenes, that these may be run through quickly, or not acted at all.

A second possibility is to race through the play, omitting or merely narrating long extracts, so that the whole makes an impact; then going through it again, with fully prepared acting of selected scenes, and perhaps further discussions (and compositions?) on some of the main themes or characters. It is certainly most important for the whole to make an impact; but even when every period is given up to the play for a fortnight or three weeks, an arrangement that is popular with some teachers, the continuity

is broken each day. This plan of going rapidly through the play has other disadvantages: some children do not like 'doing it again'; though in a rapid survey of the whole, a reiterated hint 'When we come to act it' or 'This scene is a fine one to act' or 'Here's an exciting bit for one of the acting groups to select', may keep expectation alive, and hold out sufficiently alluring promises. If, however, the teacher's efforts are directed towards arousing interest in each scene *as it unfolds itself*, and in the characters as real people, in searching for motive, and towards stimulating expectation and surmise—'What will happen next?'—and if the groups can be encouraged to give the scenes they do some vitality and expressiveness, all this would be better than 'racing through the play', and then doing it again.

There is also the drastic decision to keep Shakespeare and the junior forms apart, on the score that justice cannot be done to both; but this, we might say, is rather 'up-stage', though we know that Shakespeare hated poor acting, the 'damnable faces' and 'gagging': '. . . speak no more than is set down. . .'. It is true that we cannot do justice to both Shakespeare, the great dramatic artist, and to young children; but to keep them apart is to miss the target: is not our aim to engage our pupils' expressive powers, to get language used and imaginative abilities actively *involved* in dramatic situations? And Shakespeare is inviolate, however much our poorly comprehending children may blunder through the creations of his brain; and may we not assume as kindly an eye on these children as on the 'hard-handed

Men, that work in Athens here,
Which never laboured in their minds till now',

and the same dignity of understanding as in 'your play

needs no excuse . . . a fine tragedy; and so it is, truly, and very notably discharged'? In those scenes surely we have our authority—'If we imagine no worse of them than they of themselves, they may pass for excellent men.'

Finally, we should have in mind the whole course when we decide *how* a play is to be handled in the lower forms; for many of these plays will be enjoyed by the juniors as 'free dramatic expression', which may be no more than informal rehearsal. It cannot be appreciation of a great dramatist's art, but these plays will later be studied by the seniors as works of a great artist; then we shall expect, and usually be given, exact and thoughtful answers, and sometimes evidence of a scholarly conception of the plays and of an intelligent appreciation of the great master's art.

It may have been noticed that in most of these chapters there has been repeated insistence on high standards, but in taking plays in school the reverse is probably best for the first years of the course. For if good is *really* to accrue from the acting of plays by the lower and middle forms, we must not demand much at first, and with many classes not for some time. The purpose of the work is different from that of other aspects of the English course. We are not attempting to turn out competent actors when we have plays acted, though in other parts of the course we are trying to produce competent readers, competent speakers and competent writers. Nor are we trying to achieve a satisfying production of a play, good enough for a school audience. That is another aspect of 'Drama in School' that is not touched on here: it has its own values, and a special importance in the life of a school, such as helping to build up tradition.

The work that we have been considering has different values from those achieved in producing a school play for a parent or public audience, or in watching a professional

production. It will be remembered that the value we have in mind here is the help that a play can give to the development of the minds and characters of the pupils. Also, taking a part in a classroom play is the best way of understanding and knowing the play, and of enjoying its quality and excitement. Naturally, there are many objections to this method and these views; but a teacher who understands children, as well as drama, and the child in the maturing boy and girl, and also the special value to the growing personalities of active participation in a corporate, creative effort, and who has the courage of his convictions, and the determination to make of the play all that he can for his pupils, will not be unduly perturbed by the objections of others, or deterred from pursuing his own ideas—and he *should* pursue his own, rather than any of those expressed here that he cannot fully accept.

. . . then 'tragedy with sceptr'd pall, comes sweeping by.'
 . . . I am with Achilles shouting in the trenches, or with Theocritus in the Vales of Sicily. Or I throw my whole being into Troilus. . . .

JOHN KEATS: *Letter to George and Georgiana Keats*. October 1818.

In a drama of the highest order there is little food for censure or hatred; it teaches rather self-knowledge and self-respect.

P. B. SHELLEY: *A Defence of Poetry*.

XX

ENGLISH IN TECHNICAL SCHOOLS

A report of an inquiry into commercial education laid it down that a sound general education must be the first foundation, developing 'activity of thought, receptivity of ideas, and the capacity to speak and write correctly'.

THE separation of 'English in Technical Schools' from other aspects of English gives the appearance that for students studying technology there will be different principles, different aims and different methods from those appropriate for pupils in grammar and modern schools. So at the outset we must say forthrightly that there should not be such differences. We stand firmly with the Ministry's *Pamphlet No. 26* on this matter, where it says: 'Anything special that is done for technological students will not be effective unless it is based on sound principles drawn from general practice. There is . . . no isolated craft of "English for industry".'

Nevertheless, the attendant circumstances are usually different: the students often have few interests beyond their immediate aims and hopes; many of them are not linguistically gifted; and nearly all are inadequately trained in language—they are 'unliterary, though not unlettered'—and they do not as a rule find the ordinary language training at all welcome, for they are often impatient to 'get down to brass tacks'. Also, some of the best instructors are men 'off the bench', with admirable skill in their craft, with high standards of workmanship and with a vast experience and appreciation of sound practice;

but some of them will have had little opportunity for expressing this experience, and therefore their exposition and their language of instruction often will be the weakest part of their equipment for teaching—their Achilles' heel. Furthermore, much of the learning will be by imitation, but this will be really effective only for those who have had hobbies or other experience of manual crafts, or the handling of machinery, scientific apparatus, electrical models. The majority of the students will need far more than that; they will need verbal explanation in order to have chemical and electrical processes made clear to them, or to understand engineering projects and problems, and the working of complex machines, factory plant, etc. Above all, they will need *precise* language in order to form and to retain clear and exact conceptions of technological theories, the laws of matter and mechanics, and other aspects of physics.

It is evident that, owing to these limitations and special interests, the scope of the language work in technical schools will be narrower, and the training more specialized. Some re-orientating of attitude and effort will be necessary for some students; as the Ministry's pamphlet says: 'The next need is a fresh approach generally to the use of language and the use of books.' Again we fully agree with this, but have to emphasize the need for language training to be directly focused on language as used in technology; it must cater for the true needs of the students, and be closely related to the requirements of the work that they are doing.

It would be unprofitable for these students to spend their time on general vocabulary exercises, on punctuation that is divorced from their written work, or on grammar that is unrelated to their own problems of expression and clearer thinking. Even a study of the formal requirements

of a logical definition is unsuitable for most of the students: they need something simpler, more practical and more obviously useful. For instance, they would profit from exercises on exact description of materials, of instruments, of mechanical devices, of the apparatus of physics and chemistry, and of machines. Descriptions of these things require an understanding of what is essential and what is inessential, thus enforcing exact knowledge; attention is also drawn to precise details and exact language.

Simple exercises on the explanation of processes and the working of mechanical instruments, electrical testing and measuring machines, etc., will require different treatment. It would usually be best to keep the description of static apparatus separate from the explanation of the working of machines, because the weaker students and those unaccustomed to technical ideas and vocabulary will then have a clearer conception of their task. For instance, in describing a machine, the student has to describe what is actually in front of him as he looks at it, or imagines its visual appearance; but in explaining the working movements of an engine, he must keep his mind on the power that drives it, and on the transmission of power, for much of what he is explaining he cannot see. Explanations of this kind make demands on his imagination and on his grasp of abstract ideas, such as force, conservation of energy, engine flexibility. We may note here that it is in this kind of work that the most effective vocabulary exercises are to be found, for each new word makes its first appearance in a meaningful context, and is used for a realistic and natural purpose.

It will be best, too, to keep the writing of summaries to the field of technology and to subjects that are connected with the students' work, because if they understand what they are summarizing, they will be more capable

of selecting important details, and of writing up the facts in logical sequence: their judgment will come into play more intelligently, for it will be based on knowledge and experience. There is no profit in training young students to summarize long passages of political argument, narrative or literary criticism. Also, the ability to select facts and other details relevant to a central theme, and to assess the relative importance of these items, can be developed just as well on short passages (if not better) as on long ones. Similarly, the writing of memoranda should not be too ambitious at first, but could consist of brief statements on major items (such as purpose, action taken, result), and be limited to simple practical problems of everyday interest. The help that most young students need should be brief and definite, and the tasks for them to attempt should increase in difficulty gradually.

One aspect of the programme of training these students should not be neglected: developing their ability to communicate the needs, methods, problems, failures, of technical undertakings. Skill in effective communication is needed in all kinds of technical work and its organization. For instance, investigation has revealed that production is held up, even in the largest factories, as often by incompetent communication as by mechanical failure or shortages of material.¹ In almost every industry and technical organization it is necessary to describe engineering and production requirements and defects, to give instructions, to explain action taken, and faults in material

¹ The following bears witness to the need for skill in language; it is especially convincing when one knows the insuperable difficulties that the writer had to contend with: 'Much that had happened had brought it home to me with great force that a great many of the difficulties and much of the confusion of the past stemmed from sheer lack of precision of such words as "design", "research", "development", "production". I attempted to explore and clarify what was meant by these words.' Sir Frank Whittle: *Jet: the Story of a Pioneer*.

or in the operating of machines, and especially to report orally, as well as in writing, on stoppages, results, improvements, etc. Failure to state clearly and concisely, even the essential facts in specifications, occurs habitually and causes endless delays and personal irritations. It is therefore necessary to include in the training programme numerous exercises in various kinds of communication.

It is also essential, if this training is to be effective, to devise realistic situations to make the communication purposeful. For instance, a student giving instructions on the assembly of a magneto or electric drill should give them to a real person (in the circumstances, another student). The receiver of the instructions is there not only to enable the instructing student to speak directly to a human being and to make him understand, but to check details and the language of instruction, and to suggest improvements where necessary.

Much of this training in efficient communication will be carried out orally; but whenever possible the instructions, explanations, etc., should be written out by every student before being read orally, so that each student has some practice in the language of communication, for practice is essential for developing skill with language. Some of these exercises in communication could take the form of a business letter, others of an advertisement specification, or perhaps be planned as an imaginary talk by radio, or as an exhibition lecture, for example, on a householder's necessary knowledge about water, electricity, drainage, heat-resisting materials and devices. These exercises should be written before discussion on them in class. A very high standard should be aimed at, with special insistence on simple, exact and concrete language. This might help to break habits of using clichés, pompous words and roundabout expressions; but a teacher's evident

pleasure in straightforward, exact and natural language will do most to clear the muddy waters of their obscurity: students' appreciation of appropriate language develops best when it is gently courted and carefully tended.

The majority of the students perhaps will be aware of their weakness in language, and will want to improve their abilities; it is therefore necessary to plan their work with reference to their needs in consultation with them, for it would be useless to rely, except in odd moments, on the scrappy and unrelated exercises that are to be found in some English language courses and text-books. Exercises that are isolated from real-life situations are just the kind that these students should not be given. They should be able to see that their training has a direct and natural reference or application to some work that they are doing or might be called upon to do. Often the reason why they have failed to make progress in earlier years is that the work they have had to do lacked reality or importance, and had no urgency in some practical situation—their interest was not caught and their efforts were not used to produce something.

These students, as well as the more able ones, need challenging, though simple, tasks. A teacher might take into a classroom some different types of bolt and screw, and say: 'Supposing you do not know the names of these bolts and screws, how would you describe them?' Or 'If you wanted an assistant or your opposite number to get you one of these, what would you say to him?' Or 'Suppose a foreman said to you: "You'll need some conical-head bolts for that job." Would you know what to get?' Or the teacher might say: 'Look at these bolts. What shapes are their heads? Look at this screw. Its head unscrews, like this. What's it used for, do you think?' Someone might say: 'For fastening glass.' This answer shows

the need for exactness, for it does not explain exactly the purpose of the screw-head. Obviously, when one has an actual thing in front of a class, and refers it to a real situation, the students themselves can judge if the language is exact or inexact, and how to improve it. What has been missed by many educationists is that all pupils *need* the real world as a background, as a touchstone¹ and as a reason for their language work. What is often forgotten, too, is that the teacher of the mother tongue is concerned not only with language, but also with content—meaning—and with anything that that language refers to in the real world; and he is concerned with these three—words, meaning, and what they refer to—in almost equal proportions.

In addition to problems of communication, there is the less important problem of the correctness of the language of communication. On this point we turn again to the Ministry's pamphlet, which quotes Mr. B. C. Brookes: 'If you are worried about their English, their grammar, their punctuation, concentrate on the purpose and total effect of the writing and you will find that the English will then largely begin to look after itself.'² But many teachers in technical schools and colleges will find this advice too hard to believe. They will say: 'Do you mean to tell me I needn't bother about their grammar, spelling and punctuation, if I concentrate on the purpose of my students' writing? Why, they can't even spell correctly, much less punctuate sensibly!'

Yet that is the very thing that is recommended. And

¹ As do even great scientists: 'He [Faraday] used to carry in his waistcoat pocket a small model of an electric magnetic circuit . . . which at spare moments he would take out and contemplate, using it thus objectively to concentrate his thoughts upon the problem to be solved.'

JAMES KENDALL: *Michael Faraday*.

² *Pamphlet No. 26*. From a lecture to engineering students.

how true it is! But it is indeed hard to believe, and no one can justly blame those who cannot accept it; yet it is extraordinarily good advice, and has only to be tried and it will be found true. After a few weeks with this new emphasis and special direction, the general standard of correctness begins to improve, punctuation becomes more intelligent, vocabulary more expressive, sentences more to the point, and even spelling improves—except that of the inveterate bad spellers. Their weakness is due to poor aural reception, or poor visualization, or just inattention; and it cannot be cured by any means except by an attempt to eradicate its real cause.

The advice given about correctness is not quite the whole story; for it is necessary for the teacher to ensure that his students also concentrate on writing for a selected purpose and to produce a certain effect; correctness too must not be completely neglected, but attention to it directly encouraged. The result is that when students write with the deliberate intention of producing a certain effect, they are more careful to see that their language is clear, that it is appropriate and that it is connected in a logical sequence. With a selected purpose in mind they become more aware of the forms and conventions of correct language, consequently mistakes become fewer and their writing improves. Indeed, it is sometimes astonishing how quickly the work of students can improve, even the spelling and punctuation of students of poor ability—they then take heart and try harder and are more careful; and then they become interested in the problem of how to write well, and still further improvement is assured.

The problems of correctness are easier to deal with than those concerned with the task of improving the abilities to think clearly and logically, and to keep a train of thought in mind. Students' thinking, when it is not vague

or inaccurate, will often be too general and theoretical, even about material things and definite mechanical processes. The task is to train the thinking to become precisely detailed and concrete. It will be found also that they take far too much for granted: they will often be convinced that they fully understand a process, a theory or a proposition, when perhaps the very foundations of their understanding are insecure and unsound. Having heard such words as 'weight', 'mass', 'temperature', 'gravitation', bandied about freely and often convincingly, they suppose that they too 'know' clearly what these words refer to; but as every teachers realizes, they often have the vaguest notions about quite familiar things, and sometimes quite incorrect ones. What is needed for all students, and especially for those that are weak in bookwork, is some training in fundamental thinking.

For example, at any odd moment, or perhaps during the last half-hour of the week, it might be a good plan to pose a class with questions that demand independent, *ab ovo* thinking. The purpose of these questions would be to drive the students to penetrate to the bare essentials of an idea or theory, and to form conceptions of their own that are de-polarized from all they have heard about the topic suggested to them. For example, 'What is a valve? How does it work? Why are valves used? Where are they used and where do they occur naturally?—think of pumps, steam-engines, boilers, and the human body. How many parts of your body have valves?—Or, what is a machine? What does it mean "to work more economically or more efficiently?" Economical of what?'

At first the students may need help to get down to thinking about such things for themselves; and in attempting to produce answers that seem satisfactory to themselves, they may make some blunders or produce vague

or childish suggestions, but encouragement will soon improve the quality and soundness of their thinking. Another plan would let them chew over the queries and problems, perhaps discussing them amongst themselves, or making use of technical and scientific books in the school, college or public library, or of their own text-books; then, at the time and day arranged, the answers, solutions or information could be presented in class and discussed.

As a variation to this, the students could be given scientific and technical queries and puzzles to worry at: 'What is heat? And cold? Is there such a thing as heat? Is darkness the absence of light? Instead of "light waves" are there "dark waves" that can overpower the light waves? If glass lets light through it, it is said to be "translucent"; if you can see through it, it is called "transparent": what word would you suggest that might tell us that glass (or a wooden door or breeze block) allows cold to pass through into our rooms in winter? What measures can be taken to reduce the amount of cold passing through windows?' If an answer is not always forthcoming, or only incorrect ones, we can let the question ride, for our purpose at first is to get their minds turning over, and as the weeks go by to operate more efficiently. But whenever planning occasional exercises like these, as well as the main course, we should keep in mind that 'in proportion as interest grows more disciplined and concentrated, thought becomes more vigorous and more definitely purposive . . . and purpose, interest, desire, emotion, satisfaction, are more essential to thinking than steam is to a steam-engine'.¹

As in other types of school, the English course should give some attention to the developing of students' critical abilities. This will follow naturally in many incidental

¹ F. C. S. Schiller: *Studies in Humanism*.

ways: for example, when discussion or comment is directed towards the effectiveness of some work, such as the description of a machine; or when the success of written work in carrying out the purpose of a writer is being considered. But a certain amount of more direct training is advisable. This training might bring in an enquiry concerning the *criteria* for judging effectiveness of writing; for example, 'What is "good description"?' Discussions of this nature (and indeed of most kinds) should always work on an example, and not be allowed to remain theoretical and abstract. The enquiry would then run like this: 'Is this a good description?' (such as the opening chapter of *Adam Bede* describing the carpenter's shop)—'If so, what in it is good, and why is it good?' It is essential for the less-gifted students to take part and be able to contribute to the thinking, for they need the training even more than the others; and a concrete example will enable them to keep up with the more confident students.

However, for these students the best method to use is comparison. By presenting the class with examples of good and bad, the intuitive powers of selection are called into play, as they should be, and the ensuing discussion on the main qualities of both examples helps to develop a more reasoned judgment and a more observant eye for quality and for standards of workmanship and design. Even the silent students can be urged to come down on one side of the fence, and to agree or disagree with the views of the others. At first the contrasts should be obvious, and then as the students begin to understand the reasons for their choices, and to realize intuitively what is good, the contrasts may be less marked, or the number of things to be compared can be increased, though if there are more than about four or five it would no doubt be best to include a bad example, at least for a considerable time, unless

the class shows exceptional ability in selection and judgment.

We have considered the language of communication, but there is another aspect of language: the part it plays in our learning a new subject—in 'knowing'. There are teachers of technical subjects in schools and institutes who give their students a thorough linguistic training through their own subject, because they realize the importance of exact language in the learning of technical and scientific subjects. They realize that exact language is necessary for exact knowledge, and that clear and complete understanding in learning a technical subject is possible only when clear and exact language is used to express precise details and accurately conceived things, processes, theories. In fact, some of the best teaching of English is to be found in technical schools and colleges; and it might surprise some teachers of English in other types of school to discover the high standard that is demanded in some technical institutions, and the beautifully clear and exact language that is obtained from the students; though we must also confess that at the other end of the scale there can be found here and there a rigidity and a fruitless heavy-handed hammering at the mechanics of language that cannot be seen elsewhere, or at least only rarely.

We must not make the mistake of thinking that this high standard in language is the result of these teachers of technical subjects having a special flair for language, or a fine hobby-horse to ride. It is true that a few may make a fetish of it; but the determination to exact a high standard of expression, for themselves and for their students, is based on a sound appreciation of the worth of their subject, and on a keen realization of the part that language plays in learning and thinking, as well as in understanding their subject clearly. They realize that if the language

explaining a technical point, device or process is muddled, or vague, or too technical, or too erudite, then the students' understanding will be inexact, and their knowledge will be uncertain and insubstantial. A good sketch, diagram or the actual thing on the bench, will often compensate for failure or frailty of language; but the weaker students, especially the poor visualizers, need to have simple, concrete language *as well*.

Of course, the mechanically minded students, and those who take a delight in scientific and mechanical processes and reactions, will supplement poor expression by their own clear thinking and competent imagining: their interest and happy experiences in technical work carry their imaginations and intellect straight to the essence of a chemical or electrical or mechanical reaction, so that they perceive it with great exactness, and some of them even *feel* such a process as the transference of force as if it were a physical reaction, like holding a pipe and feeling water suddenly flow through it. Their knowledge therefore is precise, and will be a firm foundation for yet further knowledge on the same subject. It may be that these reactions of specially gifted students have led some teachers of technology to underestimate the importance of language for the ordinary students' mastery of their subjects.

Even at the cost of some repetition, we ought perhaps to note two additional points concerning the importance of language. As we have said, exact language is essential in order to form exact conceptions and thus to master exact knowledge; but exactness is also necessary in students' expression of this knowledge so that their teacher will know that they have grasped the facts and ideas firmly and can think about them clearly. Exactness of language is even more important in order that the student may retain this knowledge; for vague wording can convey only

vague ideas, and vague ideas cannot be retained in memory for long, as there is no clear-cut form of language to reappear on the screen of memory. Vague ideas and vague words can result only in vaguer remembering of those shadowy ideas and words. What we do not always take account of is that thinking and knowing are natural activities of mind, and by taking pains we can improve them, for they are simply mental habits; so that by constantly insisting on precise language and precise thinking, we can improve these mental habits of our students, as Coleridge advised: 'We should accustom ourselves to think, and reason, in precise and steadfast terms.'¹

The other aspect of English teaching that is essential as part of a strict training in precise expression and thinking is the prolonged experience of first-hand contact with varied and interesting thought and language. It is *most* important for students studying technology to have ample experience of the best language, especially of language that expresses human concerns and the adventures of man's mind. Although there is another reason, they need this language in order to supplement their training in language that is focused on specialized interests and occupations. Experience of this kind—of clear, expressive language, rich in content and interest, and vivid in the portrayal of human beings and their thoughts, feelings and motives in a great variety of circumstances, can of course be obtained only through the reading of literature. This reading should be as wide as possible, but it need not be accompanied for most students by any special training in appreciation or in criticism; though the more literary minded ones would profit from that kind of training. What is all important for the majority is that their rapidly maturing minds should have much vivid experience of the best

¹ *Aids to Reflection.*

language. For it is by this experience that we learn to think clearly and to adapt our thinking in varied fields of thought; and it is by this experience that our minds become capable of handling varied types of knowledge, theory, procedure, as well as the facts and problems of the everyday practical affairs of human life.

The minds of all those who are concerned with technology need to be alert, perceptive and flexible, and so able to deal with every kind of problem with which they may be confronted. They need to be quick in finding adequate solutions to the many and varying—and unexpected—problems that they will have to face in their work in factory, research, transport and other social services, in repair work and in handling equipment of many kinds. And the more specialized the work, the more necessary will be a varied programme of reading to keep the mind of the ardent and devoted specialist capable of searching farther afield, of looking at things from all sides, of seeking relations and factors that might bear on his problem or on the circumstances in which it occurs.

The minds of our scientists and technologists have to be *kept* adventurous, exploring, brimful of curiosity, eager to experiment, and unafraid of unprecedented undertakings and projects, and they must be untrammelled by custom and routine. It is in reading biography, history, exploration and travel, and especially literature that the mind can be kept supple, free from rule-of-thumb thinking, alive to unusual possibilities and well out of the rut of preconceived ideas; and thus *able* to study every new development and discovery of science and technology with an unbiased and receptive mind. But the scientist needs especially to beware of cutting himself off from a true understanding and appreciation of human needs, feelings and hopes and of every kind of human concern—social,

political, commercial—remembering that every branch of technology touches human life at some point, and will in some way or other affect the lives of his fellows. When all is said and done, technology exists mainly for the benefit and happiness of human beings, and for the amelioration of the material evils of this life. We might also remember that mere skill, however adequate, is sterile until it is directed and controlled by human understanding and purpose.

In addition, therefore, to the improvement of students' specialized use of language, with a drive towards high grade expression, their wide reading in all fields of human endeavour is necessary; but especially wide reading that brings an active, constructive imagination into play; and that disciplines it by making it conform and obedient to the limitations of the circumstances in which it becomes active. Among the most compelling demands and the strictest discipline that can be imposed on human imaginations are those which great literature imposes. Here the rules of the game are laid down for the characters that have to be imagined in the factual circumstances of time, place, social level; and within the traditions and moral codes of the life in which they move. The actions, thoughts and motives of the characters have to arise naturally out of that background in order to be understood, to be convincing and in order to keep our disbelief in suspense. What we see in the mirror that the masters of language hold up for us in literature and drama must seem to us to be natural, even inevitable: we must *believe* that Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo in his chair, and not just assume that he does. Literature makes very great demands on our imagination; it can also stir it to intense and scrupulous activity.

But what has this to do with students of technology?

An actual conversation piece may answer this: 'I think I ought to include somewhere in my book a special note on the part that imagination plays in teaching and in learning technology.'—*Scientist (of wide experience and insight)*: 'I should have said it is the starting-point.'—'You think, then, that it should be included?'—'Well, if there's anything more important, I should like to know it!' We might also recall that references to the mental equipment of great scientists often imply that their greatness was due in some degree to the quality of their imagination; for example, J. G. Crowther emphasizes 'the comprehensive fertility of Franklin's imagination'.¹

Misconceptions concerning the part played by the imagination in scientific and technical undertakings—in research, planning and surveying, in experimenting and inventing, etc.—have been not only disparaging, but positively damaging. Some of these misconceptions and confusions have arisen, no doubt, from equating imagination with fantasy, day-dreaming and castles in Spain, forgetting that the poet's *creative* imagination, though possibly 'in a fine frenzy rolling', has to submit to the hard craft of words, and that the sculptor's *constructive* imagination works on the task of mastering Abstract Form with mallet and chisel.

In order to understand the great importance of imagination in science and technology, we cannot do better than give careful thought to what that great pioneer, Galton, wrote in 1888: 'This free action of vivid visualizing is of much importance in connection with the higher processes of generalized thought. . . . The faculty is undoubtedly useful in a high degree to inventive mechanics . . . they invent machines as they walk, and see them in height, breadth and depth as real objects. . . . A visual image is

¹ *Famous American Men of Science.*

the most perfect form of mental representation wherever the shape, position, and relations of objects in space are concerned. It is important in every handicraft and profession where design is required. The best workmen are those who visualize the whole of what they propose to do, before they take a tool in their hands . . . all who do not follow routine have need of it. . . . Our bookish and wordy education tends to repress this valuable gift of nature. . . . A faculty that is of importance in all technical and artistic occupations, that gives accuracy to our perceptions, and justness to our generalizations, is starved by lazy disuse, instead of being cultivated judiciously. . . .¹

Those of us who are not mental specialists or psychologists may have to remember that imagination, in the sense of its image-forming activity, is one of the main modes of *understanding* and of *thinking*, though it would not have much play in the abstract realms of pure mathematics, as in 'when space or motion is spoken of in pure mathematics it is not actual space or actual motion, as we know these in experience, that are spoken of, but any entity possessing those abstract general properties of space or motion that are employed in the reasonings of geometry or dynamics. The question whether these properties belong, as a matter of fact, to actual space or actual motion, is irrelevant to pure mathematics. . . .'² It is essential therefore for the technical student to come to his subject with an imagination accurately responsive, that is, capable of responding with great exactness to stimuli (words, things, images) which are themselves exact; yet the most powerful, and welcome, instrument to train this imagination—literature

¹ *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development.*

(We need not, doubtless, boggle over the use of the word 'faculty', because we are not concerned here with the problem of the brain having different operations to perform, possibly by specialized areas.)

² Bertrand Russell: *The Principles of Mathematics.*

—is often relegated by those who do not understand its value to a place of less importance than utilitarian language—in their examinations for school children, in text-books and syllabuses.

Literature (properly taught) exercises the mind, sharpens its apprehensions, and nourishes it with ideas as 'food for thought', stocking it with knowledge, beliefs, and experiences of all kinds. And the student mind especially needs to be well stocked with such mental food, for without rich and varied nourishment its thinking becomes imitative, or self-centred, its interests remain at a low subsistence level, barely beyond physical needs and bodily impulses; and its finer potentialities become stifled by the scraps of daily conversational small-change and the duller routine demands of life, or, more insistent and less escapable, by the grosser desires of body and self-interest. And when hope and ideals and creative instincts are starved, the will becomes frustrated. It is very necessary for the mind and spirit to dwell sometimes in another world, and in one that is not dominated by self and by the strivings of self to achieve only its own needs and desires. We must not underestimate the need of the human spirit for refreshment and rest, away from the daily fight for material and self-centred ends: literature, and indeed all art, can provide this refreshment.

It must be pointed out that this necessity for wide reading, for literature and the other arts, and for the feeding and the disciplining of the imagination has little to do with what seems to be commonly referred to as 'culture'. There is also no suggestion here that technical students should be 'given a knowledge' of the masterpieces of the arts—painting, architecture, music, drama, literature. A *knowledge* of these, we may remark, does not entitle a person to be called 'cultured'. What we do suggest is that

students of technology would be better people, have better minds and be more fitted for posts of responsibility, if they could *enjoy* some of these masterpieces, and could find in them interest, refreshment, and a way of exploring unwonted experience.

It is true that many such students would need some training to enable them to enjoy masterpieces of the arts or to increase their enjoyment, just as many students of other faculties do; but the great creative works of mankind were not fashioned for 'Arts' students alone; and one section of the student population should not be cut off from some of the greatest manifestations of the creative spirit and craftsmanship of human beings. Students of technology are also concerned with design, invention, the application of man's artistic powers, and the best principles of drawing, construction and production—and have they not 'hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions'? Or are we to subscribe to a de-humanizing of technical students and their teachers by allowing them to evade the study of literature or of some other art, or letting it go by default?

We must conclude that the universal beauty of mediaeval craftsmanship sprang from conditions which enabled every artisan, however humble, to be an artist.

DAVID HARRISON: *Tudor England*.

Both art and science have their end to make things clear to the mind.

W. P. KER: *On the Philosophy of Art*.

XXI

TEACHER AND PUPIL

The teacher has yet to learn that his first duty is not to give, but to beget; to get behind the learner's superficial normality so as to capture his spontaneity in its full force and freshness.

KENNETH RICHMOND: *Education in England.*

PERHAPS more than any other member of a school staff, the teacher of English has to have his mind intent on his pupils—on their minds, attitudes, personalities—rather than on his subject and the teaching of it. This is because his subject is the mother tongue, and because nearly all of his work deals with his pupils' speaking, reading, writing, understanding and appreciation, and because his responsibility for his pupils' language inescapably makes him to some extent liable also for the content and the quality of their thinking. He must be concerned, too, with their feelings, their hopes and fears, though to a lesser extent, and with every aspect of human experience that their language expresses.

It is because of this responsibility that the right relationship between pupil and teacher is especially important. The better he understands his pupils and is at home among them in the classroom and outside it, the more will they have confidence in him and will readily exert themselves in co-operation with him; and the more will they profit from his company and from contact with his mind and experience. Nevertheless, he need not keep this relationship in mind, or ever give anxious thought to it; indeed,

the less he thinks about it the better. What he *should* think about and ever keep in mind are his pupils' needs and interests. For he must focus his thinking on understanding pupils, and on what he must do to help them to increase their language skills, especially their capacity to make the best use of the language that they have at their disposal. When those are his main concerns, and he can put his heart into such work, the right relationship with his pupils will look after itself.

There is, however, no escaping the fact that whatever atmosphere of *bonhomie* or friendly matter-of-factness may pervade his classroom, his pupils must be kept actively working at his subject: no prescription or pointer to success in teaching can improve on this. Also, if he intends that they shall learn, he must be wary of telling them very much; for mere talk, even lively, interesting and informative talk about literature or drama, cannot help them very much. We ought not to over-rate the effect that talk has on the great majority of pupils; for we can frankly admit that listening in some classes can be pretty apathetic, and that too much listening produces second-rate minds. To turn our active and diversely equipped young children into apathetic listeners all on one pattern is not what is wanted, if they are to face modern life and all its many difficulties with courage and self-confidence.

We have to realize that 'the old set-up of knowledgeable teacher and ignorant class' has gone; but unfortunately the educational world has let slip its hold on the sound principle that only when children are really working at their tasks are they truly learning. A re-affirmation is needed that the teacher's mind needs to be centred on making his pupils work (in English, at speaking, reading, writing, acting). There is no substitute for this; though work can be enjoyable, and absorbed activity on a task

is soon transformed into play, through what R. L. Stevenson called 'that superior earnestness that properly belongs to play'. To work hard is more than a duty or a discipline, and it cannot be right, or fair, to pretend to school children that things of value and a true education can be won without individual effort and persevering hard work.

The teacher of English has also to beware of allowing his lessons to dawdle along with only some desultory questioning. He must beware of making knowledge more prominent than the using of language; and of thinking that exercises that 'test' knowledge may also improve his pupils' language abilities. Some testing is no doubt necessary occasionally; but when pupils are attacking a language task they will usually reveal gaps in knowledge as well as weakness in skill, thereby often making any testing unnecessary. A test is often just 'marking time'; it does not make ground in any direction, and often may be merely a halt in progress. We must be chary of pulling up the potato haulms to see if the potatoes are growing.

On the other hand, when our pupils are participating in active, challenging work, we may be assured that they are making progress; and therefore pupil participation will often be the main factor to consider when planning an English lesson. It suggests an explanation of why 'The Group Method' has been found to be so successful in secondary modern as well as in grammar schools; for when one pupil in each of four groups is reading aloud, four times as much reading is produced as when one pupil is reading to the whole class. Similarly, by carrying out work in groups, especially in the lower and lower-middle forms, there can be four times as much oral English, four form magazines being planned and written, four scenes of a play being prepared, and in some classes the felicitous scene of four groups, each under a Moderator or Adjudi-

cator (how an imposing title will charm a troublesome pupil!), going eagerly through the written work of the class with large blue pencils.

The teacher with his mind on his pupils' needs will, no doubt, give more attention to fostering their responsibility for their own work and to their progress than to the perfecting of his material or of their reproduction of what they have studied. He must take pains, too, to ensure that they also have a personal sense of their own progress and achievements; for a number of the pupils in a class are always in need of encouragement and of a sense of purpose in their work; often needing these more than additional instruction. As we all know, instruction is easy to give, and often satisfying to the giver (though not necessarily to the recipients); but to initiate progress, especially of slow-minded pupils, and to open the eyes of the backward ones to the value of their work is difficult, though this is often especially important to a pupil, and if achieved, at times generously rewarding to the teacher. But it will be revealed to the wise that pupils learn to write better by seeing where they have improved, and what step forward they have taken, rather than by hearing the most knowledgeable advice on how to write.

It is a wonderful fillip to a pupil to come across some certain evidence that he has improved; it increases his wish to improve still more, and it holds out the hope that he will. Some pupils, indeed, have to discover that unexpectedly they are *not* incompetent, for sometimes frequent adverse comment will have drilled into them an acceptance of their own ineptitude. We see, then, that it is not always knowledge or even skill that a teacher needs to concern himself with: it is often his pupils' self-confidence, their hopes and fears. He has to give attention to the strengthening of their will to learn, but sometimes

even more to confidence-building and to nursing their insecure faith in their own powers.

Therefore, at first, a teacher should deliberately try to increase his pupils' interest in the work, to see its value and its necessity. We should try to make the work rational, not hesitating to explain the psychology or the philosophy, even perhaps to third formers. Pupils should feel that there is an adequate purpose behind all they do, and that they are not working just because it is 'school'. As we have said, attention has to be given to the harnessing of those impulses that stimulate pupils to profit from their schooling: the impulses of interest, enjoyment, and each pupil's ideals and hopes, as well as his special needs. What satisfaction is gained from individual progress and from small personal achievement will stimulate further effort and will maintain progress.

In one's first year or so of teaching, and in the first few months in a new school, the proper way to be thinking about the work is, no doubt, 'What worthwhile tasks *should* these pupils be working on, and how can I get them to work on these tasks?' Quiet meditation can be the best preparation, for the true aim of each task should ideally be reasoned out with oneself. Even a few minutes' thought on each problem is better than the despairing last resort decision: 'All I need do is to get them through the next exercise in the book!'; for that is not only as dulling as it is deadening, but it also leads to losing the confidence of the class. No mental growth can thrive on such a prescription; and it will bring its special nemesis: boredom to teacher and class alike.

We are apt to forget that nearly all pupils *like* to learn, though most of them would rather not *work*; nevertheless they admire the man who makes them work really hard and gets them on. Also, almost every class is fully aware

of how much work is expected of them, and how far a particular master will go in getting work done; though the teacher himself may be unconscious of his manner, his policy and his resources, or of his own inflexibility of will—or lack of it. But when boys and girls feel that they are progressing and acquiring useful knowledge, they never resent being worked hard, though they may put up a show of being ‘hard done by’ simply as a matter of policy or tradition.

So whatever else happens in the classroom, and whatever fine ideals have been accepted or imbibed, the pupils must work. No increase in skill, no improvement in using the mother tongue, or any other achievement in learning or expression can take place unless the energies and efforts of the pupils have been actively engaged in doing some work—in doing something that needs the focus of their attention and their resolute will to try to complete or solve it. A challenge will often animate the extra effort, and a slightly stiff obstacle to surmount will arouse determination, especially if it is a task that they will be proud to achieve: then the ordinary difficulties do not arise, and if the pupils do not succeed completely, that may not matter, provided they have tried; for if they try hard, they will learn.

The teacher who is intent on his pupils’ intellectual development and on their increasing mental agility and productiveness, and who is determined to discover how well they can speak and write, will find that their progress, even when it is slow, is sufficiently rewarding. To watch living beings growing and developing under one’s care, and to see them improve in one way or another, because one has given them just the right help at the right time, is a most satisfying experience.

What we strive for is an ideal, never to be attained;

nevertheless what we look for in a teacher is some enthusiasm for his subject and for tending young shoots and saplings. It would be well enough for his enthusiasm to glow steadily, rather than feverishly burn up his energies; for even if there is no more than a pale glow, this will light up his subject, and light him up too, which is also most desirable; and perhaps it will set some of his pupils alight—with inspiration or a burning desire to achieve ‘good deeds’. And if his enthusiasm often burns low or fitfully, so long as there is enthusiasm, that will be understandable, for no one’s store of power is inexhaustible. In sober fact, it might be better usually if the fires of enthusiasm were well banked, for teaching is an art, and the restraint that good art imposes enables the pressure of its thought and meaning to be felt at every point; and, in teaching, this should be *felt*, not merely perceived as an excited expression of ebullient intention and hope.

In addition to enthusiasm and restraint every teacher of English should have a steadfast conviction of the importance of his subject, and of the greatness of the language he is teaching. Its importance, because a pupil’s growing skill with language is one of the main factors in his being educated. Not only will a growing skill with language assist in the growth of his knowledge; but his mastery of most of the school subjects depends very largely on his mastering the language used in studying them, particularly depending on the precision of the language of exposition and description—even excellence in mathematics is promoted by excellence in the use of the mother tongue. And not only is a growing skill with language able to assist in the pupil’s social development, helping him to take his full place in the society around him, and to find there the means and opportunities for further growth; but it is

language that enters—fully or partially—into all that goes on in his consciousness.

In particular, the teacher of English needs to be a person of uncommon solicitude for standards in linguistic expression, sharply observant and wisely critical of all language usage, and keenly alive to the relevance of language to the situation in which it appears: quickly aware, therefore, not only of the full meanings and associations of words; but also of their special appropriateness (or inappropriateness) to each particular phase, moment or aspect of reality. He needs therefore to be a person very much alive to real things and to the ever-changing modes, qualities, and structures of real life—to everything playing upon his senses, compelling his thought or conjured up in his imagination. Indeed, we may say that there is almost no aspect of human endeavour or experience that is irrelevant to language. But if a choice *had* to be made, however, it would be more important to him to have a flair for realizing the concerns and interests of the young than for him to be gifted with a specially sensitive feeling for language and a fine command of words.

Obviously, few teachers will be equipped with such admirable linguistic abilities as we have referred to; nevertheless, those who have the humility to doubt their own powers may be assured that by dint of constant attention to language and of daily *wrestling with words*, a man may train himself to appraise and appreciate the fitness of words in carrying out their tasks. Indeed, every teacher of English ought by rights to exercise himself in the language and in the practice of the craft of writing, especially, if possible, for profit: this would increase his understanding of his pupils' difficulties in using language, and would reveal to him how he could help them. The least he could do would be to carry out the tasks that he

proposes to his classes, both senior and junior, even if only now and again, or perhaps only the more creative or difficult tasks: the immense gain in doing this would very soon be evident to him. Experience can be a wise teacher, especially in the craft of writing, where there is no finality.

Such is the nature of these novices, that think to have learning without labour, and treasure without travail: either not understanding or else not remembering, that the finest edge is made with the blunt whetstone; and the fairest jewel fashioned with the hard hammer.

J. LYL: *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit.*

XXII

FURTHER ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Character too is a process and an unfolding.

GEORGE ELIOT: *Middlemarch*.

IT may not be of practical help to consider how the teaching of the mother tongue may affect a boy's ideals and conduct, his awareness of moral truths, his standards of behaviour, the worthiness of his motives and the integrity of his inner life: his thoughts, beliefs, intentions, will. Also nowadays, moral education, and even indirect moral education, is looked at askance; perhaps, we may think, with some justice. And likely enough what is presented here for further thought may arouse doubts and objections, or the justifiable complaint 'We can't agree or disagree until we know how all this works out in practice.' But objections and criticism are welcome, so long as there is a realization that the right-minded teaching of the mother tongue has something to do *vitally* with the pupil's total personality and life; and is not merely an examination subject or a routine drill to improve a utilitarian skill.

In the last resort, the teaching of the mother tongue, and in fact all teaching, in some degree involves moral standards. It is evident that any insistence on standards of expression and of thinking, and on the correctness of language, makes a call on the will, and on the wish to improve, also on the willing submission of personal desires, wishes, intentions. Thus, at least during the period when work is being done willingly, the pupil exerts some dis-

cipline on himself and on his physical, mental and conative activities. Any submission of this kind, however slight, disciplines the self, giving it experience of a way of living and behaviour which subordinates its activities and urges to an end that is not purely selfish and self-centred.

We can see, too, quite simply that in the willing co-operation of boys and girls in projects and other undertakings, in group activities during lessons and even in the ordinary class discussion, there is always the social disciplining of individual needs and desires, although this discipline will often be 'free' and unperceived. But when this demands considerable effort—of intensive application or prolonged study, or perhaps uncongenial occupation, for the good of the group or class—the discipline is far more exacting, and the submission of private ends makes greater calls on the individual: the moral effect is therefore correspondingly stronger. However, to counter-balance this and to make the discipline welcome, this diversion of self-interest often brings its own reward of happiness and freedom from the nagging claims of self-centred worries and desires. And we must not underestimate the worries and minor anxieties of school children; to them these are very real and sometimes of overwhelming importance from moment to moment, especially for the younger ones, and for those who have inadequately controlled feelings, and also for those who have not acquired a sense of proportion as regards their own personal wishes, intentions and private affairs.

A brief consideration of some of the simple human relationships and influences that are of special concern to immature minds and personalities, leads us to perceive the particular relevance of English literature and drama to children of school age. For in the reading and study of literature and in the first-hand participation of the pupils

in dramatic activities, they are being constantly confronted with human values and acceptable adult standards of conduct. For example, in the boy's reading in his third year, say, of *Kidnapped*, he cannot but be impressed by the importance that Alan Breck puts on courage. And in all his reading, he sees how human beings behave in various situations, and this behaviour is commended in his eyes whenever he has become so deeply interested in these human beings that he longs for their escape from duress and difficulty, and their triumph in every hazard. The importance of experiences of this kind for the formation of ideals and conceptions of what is of good report cannot be estimated, but their value can hardly be denied. A relevant passage from *Northanger Abbey*, which undoubtedly expresses Jane Austen's own faith, indicates the value of literature: "And what are you reading, Miss—?"—"Oh! it is only a novel!" replies the young lady; while she lays down her book with affected indifference, or momentary shame. "It is only *Cecilia*, or *Camilla*, or *Belinda*"; or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language.'

Maybe we too unthinkingly regard novel-reading at times with some indifference or lack of faith in its value for maturing minds; but of course that is the result of the popularity of novels of indifferent quality. And it is very puzzling, especially for those with stringent literary standards and little intimate contact with young children, to know what novels are of value to children of eleven to fourteen; but it is certain that most of them are not ready for the great novels, and that they will profit far more from reading the much less great, that is, books that they

themselves read voraciously, and enjoy reading. At any rate, ideally, they should be reading what they can read with deep absorption, but not to the exclusion of other vital activities; for ideally they should also be exploring the countryside, wandering by the seaside, in woods, caves and over the hills and far away, and should be 'messing about in boats', caring for animals, using their hands in manual crafts and scientific experiments, and especially in making things.

We must not suppose that reading novels is an essential only for the probable 'Arts' student; it is just as essential for those with scientific, technical and mathematical bents and interests; for, as Dean Swift wrote: 'A little grain of romance is no ill ingredient to preserve and exalt the dignity of human nature, without which it is apt to degenerate into everything that is sordid, vicious, and low.'¹ And we should not forget the ease with which youth can degenerate into viciousness. But do we also keep in mind how important it is to preserve in the young boy and young girl, as they pass up the school, a sense of the dignity of their persons, and their own human nature and of the wonder and the frailty of their human bodies? Appreciation of literature is only one aspect of that training that has far wider issues than the growth of the critical ability to perceive the good in literature: it helps to develop a sense of values—to perceive the good wherever it may reside.

When Sir Richard Livingstone wrote: 'It is right to teach people to criticize, but it is even more important to train them concurrently to admire', obviously he was not only thinking of reasoned admiration; it is not sufficient to train people merely to choose and intellectually to assess the good. The training that is so vitally important

¹ *Hints Toward an Essay on Conversation.*

is, as Coleridge reminded us, 'a matter of living'; the teacher of English, therefore, is concerned with the pupils' whole experience. But he is not working in isolation, with a subject that has far different aims from those of the other school subjects: the aims of all are concerned with the child, to help him and to give him the best. But the best learning does not only stock the mind and invigorate intellectual abilities, it 'endued men's minds with a true sense of the frailty of their persons, the casualty of their fortunes, and the dignity of their soul and vocation.'¹ And any training that endued men's minds with such thoughts and attitudes influences character, and is in effect moral education.

We must remember, too, that English is not set apart, as the sole source of 'culture', for the greatest powers of the human mind are displayed also in the service of science, technology and mathematics, as we may see by reading the lives of many of the greatest scientists and the story of their life's work: their scrupulous handling of fact and evidence, their imaginative perception of significant fact, their courageous persistence—often in the face of failure and opposition—and their determination to get at the truth, at all cost to themselves. These constitute moral greatness.

An appreciation of the good—in the arts, in the work of men's hands, in all disinterested human endeavour—is just as important for the student scientist and the student technologist as for the young Humanist. We may call to mind that it was one of the great scientists who wrote: 'The beautiful, with which living Nature is crowded, is sometimes also useful . . . but in the majority of cases there is no usefulness, and we are not sorry. For it leads us to

¹ Francis Bacon: *The Advancement of Learning*.

wonder whether beauty is not an expression of the spiritual essence of the world.'¹

All children possess the power to appreciate, in the sense of delighting in the finer qualities of some thing, process or activity, and of admiring and feeling the wonder of created things; and it is the duty of educators to preserve that power of appreciation and sense of wonder. For the teacher of English it is literature, and often especially poetry, that will keep this sense of wonder active: 'Here as in philosophy wonder is the beginning of wisdom, and the end too, when the wonder of novelty has turned into the deeper wonder at the well-known, the familiar, the unfathomable beauty.'²

It is, however, certain that classroom talk about 'the spiritual essence of the world', 'the dignity of the soul', or 'unfathomable beauty' is not wanted; and may often achieve the opposite of what is intended and hoped, for most school children are not ready to think about ultimate ends; and though some problems of philosophy and religion can grip the attention of a class, the great majority of children are not interested in theoretical problems and abstract propositions. As far as the teacher of English is concerned, it seems therefore that he should stick to his last, and should not deliberately lead the thinking of his pupils towards these conceptions we have mentioned; though naturally, if questions arise in class, or if a discussion enters into such fields of thought, he will see that the problems that crop up are adequately dealt with. But in sticking to his last, he will, doubtless, constantly renew his efforts and skill to help his pupils to become aware of the beauty in the literature they read, and in the things they speak and write about in their compositions; though

¹ Sir J. Arthur Thomson: *Scientific Riddles*.

² W. P. Ker: *Lecture on Tennyson*.

always submitting himself to the guidance of restraint, and to the power of the words of literature and drama to do their own work and do it effectively, without his interference. What active steps he does take to help his pupils will be guided and directed by his faith that beauty is an expression of the spiritual essence of the world, and that wonder in the unfathomable beauty of the familiar as well as of the unfamiliar will in imperceptible ways enhance the dignity of the human soul.

Augustine, he who did not despair when Rome fell, but who elicited from the very ruin that root-lesson of all Christianity, that the highest success may be bred from the most dismal apparent failure.

G. G. COULTON: *Studies in Medieval Thought.*

APPENDIX A

EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES

TEXT:—*'And this is how I see the East. I have seen its secret places and have looked into its very soul; but now I see it always from a small boat, a high outline of mountains, blue and afar in the morning; like faint mist at noon; a jagged wall of purple at sunset. I have the feel of the oar in my hand, the vision of the scorching blue sea in my eyes. And I see a bay, a wide bay, smooth as glass and polished like ice, shimmering in the dark. A red light burns far off upon the gloom of the land, and the night is soft and warm.'*

JOSEPH CONRAD: *Youth*.

Examples of Stage One Questioning, the simplest form of questioning for first-year pupils¹ and all backward readers:

1. Whose secret places has the writer seen?

Ans. The secret places of the East.

2. And where has he looked?

Ans. Into the very soul of the East.

3. What does he see from a small boat?

Ans. A high outline of mountains.

4. What do these mountains look like?

Ans. They look blue and far away.

5. And what are they like?

Ans. They are like faint mist at noon.

6. What do they look like at sunset?

Ans. Like a jagged wall of purple.

7. What does he notice about his hands?

Ans. He notices the feel of the oar.

8. And what has he in his eyes?

Ans. He has the vision of the scorching blue sea in his eyes.

9. What is the sea in the bay like?

¹ It is not suggested that the above passage is suitable for the first year.

Ans. It is smooth as glass.

10. What is 'shimmering in the dark'?

Ans. The surface of the water, because it is polished like ice.

Examples of Stage Two Questioning, to help untrained readers at almost all levels to imagine more completely and to understand more fully:

1. What kind of places are referred to as 'the East' by the writer?
2. What might be these 'secret places' that the writer has seen?
3. When the writer was writing 'now I see it', was he actually looking at it?
4. What do we know about the writer from the first three lines?
5. Why should he notice the *outline*, rather than the mountains themselves?
6. Why does the blue of the mountains change to purple?
7. What is the outline of the mountains like?
8. Why should the mountains look like a wall?
9. Why should the writer see 'the scorching blue sea' in his eyes as a vision?
10. What does 'polished like ice' tell us about the sea in the bay?

APPENDIX B

EXAMPLES OF JUNIOR PUPILS' CORRECTIONS OF COMPOSITIONS

The extracts below are taken from compositions written by pupils in Standard 8 of a school in Windsor, Ontario, in the first term of the school year; they would therefore be doing the same kind of work as the first year in an English secondary school. The corrections, given below, were all made by the pupils themselves *without help*. In each case the corrections were made in red pencil by a neighbour. It will be seen that in almost every instance the alteration is an improvement, sometimes of the expression, showing that the correcting was not merely mechanical, but that ability to improve their own language had been developed under some special tuition. This tuition was a regular feature of the written work in English. One might say that the children had been so well trained that they could be entrusted with the correction of their own or their neighbour's written work. I think we may fairly draw the conclusion that if a Canadian Standard 8 can do this, then all pupils above Form One could also be trained to do it effectively enough.

Corrections are in brackets:

1. *How the Beaver Got Its Fat Tail* (His Fat Tail)

One day a beaver was sitting on a log. His wife was ringing out cloths in the washing machine ringer close by him. Mr Beaver has his black worm-like (worm like) tail dangling (,) on the. . . when a (an) old nearsighted fish came along. The old nearsighted (~~yeet/zz/zz/zz/zz~~) fish mistook Mr. Beaver's tail for a worm (,) He bit (at) Mr. Beaver's tail and Mr. Beaver pulled his tail out quickly. Oops! His tail got caught in the washing machine. Mr. Beaver yelled Mrs. Beaver screamed and the tail was as (~~zz~~) flat as a pancake. It seems as though

all the (other) beavers liked Mr. Beaver's flat tail (,) as they put their tails through the washing machine too. So thats how beavers got their flat tails. (Thats how. .)

2. *Why Grasshoppers are Green*

A short while ago about the year of thirteen hundred and forty-one there lived a grasshopper. His colour was a bright red (,) with yellow eyes. One fine day he packed his bag and went travelling (.) (He went) along a black (,) desolate (,) grimy path. Suddenly he saw a big (,) green box. He opened the lid a (and) out flew (some) greasy (,) -green (,) chlorophyl toothpaste. It ran so fast he couldn't escape (.) and (~~and~~) from (From) head to toe he was covered with the (green) toothpaste it (It) was so sticky it never came off. That is why today grasshoppers are green.

3. *How the Zebra got it's Stripe (Its Stripes)*

Once upon a time in South Africa there was a group of animals (,) and they (~~and~~ that) decided to have a parade. They were supposed to dressup (dress) in their best costumes. On the day of the parade(,) a man came to the animal kingdom to sell some odd(-) coloured substants (stance). This white (-) coloured animal came up to him(.) and (~~and~~) with (With) a tear in his eye he said(,) "I have no costume(.) can (Can) you help me(?)" and (~~and~~) the (The) man open (opened) up a can and with a brush put on some strips (stripes). The Zebra was a new attraction, and to this day he still has those strips (stripes).

4. *How the Bear Got Her Fur Coat*

Once upon a time all bears didn't have any fur coats. One chilly day a bear was wallpapering his living room. He wasn't so sure of himself because he didn't know the first thing about it specially mixing the glue (paste). He added too much power (powder) and it rose out of the pan and (~~and~~) on(to) the clueless bear. Then he heard the voice of his wife saying(,) go ("Go) get my fur coat at the store (or) I'll be late for my teaparty(".)

Forgetting about the glue (paste) rushed (he rushed) for (to) the store. After inquiring he found out that the coat was not taylored yet. (was not yet tailored). He called his wife and(,) told her (about it) and she (~~she~~). She) said that they can do it (could do it) at home. He then brought the coat home,(.) his (His) wife then (~~then~~) asked him to slip it on so she could adjust (alter) it. Well! much (Much) to their surprise he couldn't get it off because the glue (paste) had hardened and that is how the bear got his fur coat.

5. On his arival (arrival) he met a strange(-) looking animal this animal (. This animal) was a light colowered (coloured) . . . He walk (walked) down a path with the can of paint suspended on his head (placed on his head). . . .

6. One cold, tingling winter morning the bear, whos (whose name) was Harvey, decided he would like to go ice-fishing. . . . The squirrel had caught seven fish and Harvey only caught five so he decided, being very jealous of the squirrel, (~~he~~ he would) to put bait on his tail. That was very dangerous, because if a fish wanted the bait he would tug, pull and yank till he got it. Wouldn't you know it that's (Wouldn't you know that? That's) exactly what happened to Harvey off (Off) came his tail, and Harvey went home crying. That (That's) how the bear got it's (its) short tail.

The above are true copies of the originals. It will be seen that the majority of the alterations are correct, and that the punctuation is good. It appears that the pupils' having to correct each other's compositions every week, as this class had to do, trains them to take pains with punctuation and spelling.

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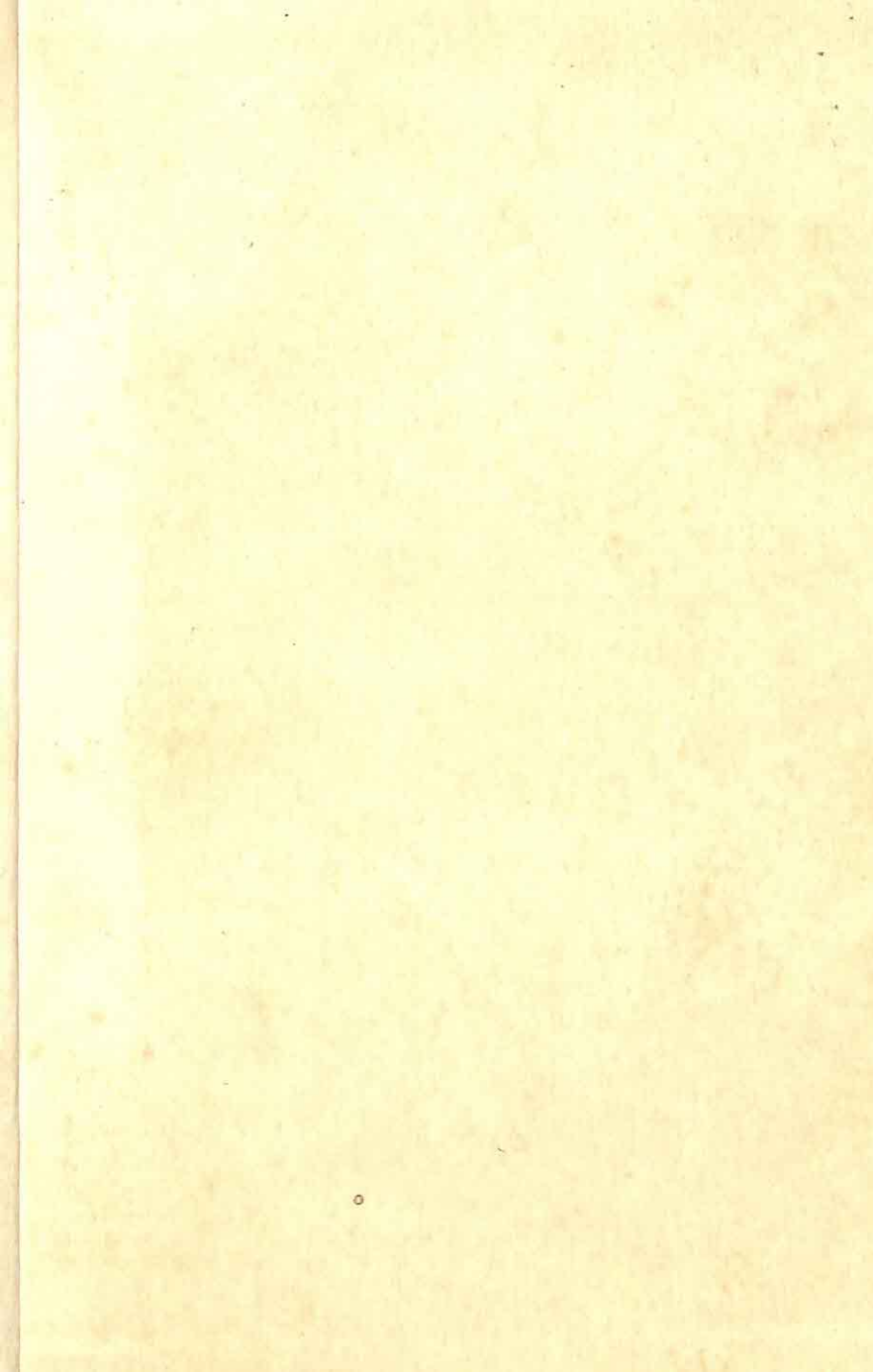
INDEX

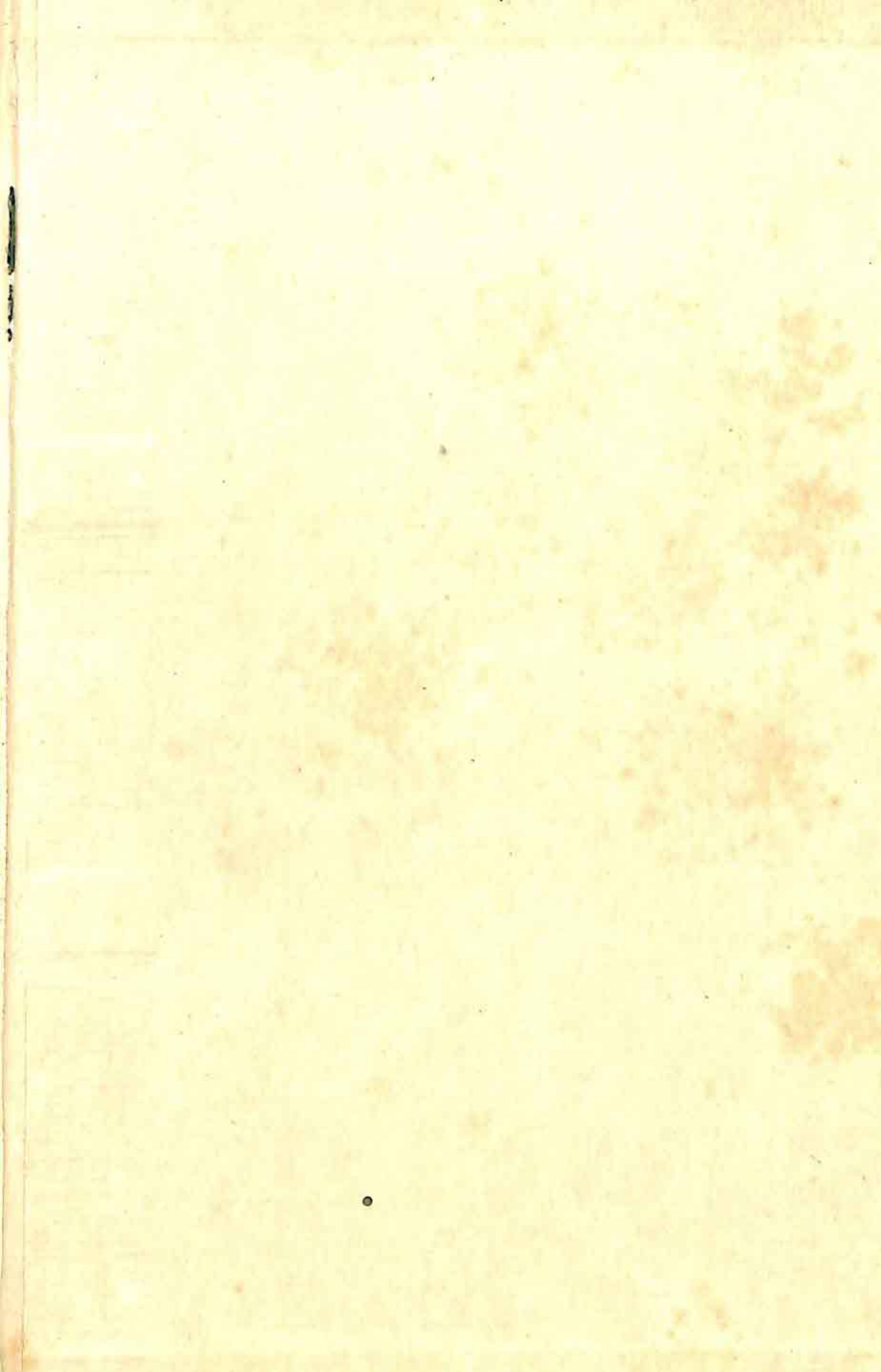
- Aims and Objectives, 19 ff, 23 ff, 43, 62, 126, 131, 135, 173
- Appreciation, of literature, Quality, etc., 65, 122, 127, 135, 140-1, 205-6
- Confidence, Pupil's, 67, 84, 91, 99, 156, 196
- Correctness of Language, 79, 80, 93 ff, 110-11, 179, 180, 211
- Criticism, 128, 142 ff, 179, 182
- Description, 108-9, 175, 183
- Discipline, of Language and Literature, 58, 82, 132, 136, 155, 167, 188, 191
- Drama, 21, 152 ff, 203
- Improvised, 41, 159
- English as the Medium of Instruction, 6-7
- Error Frequency Count, 98
- Experimenting with Words, 90
- Explanation, 85-6, 109
- Expression and Communication, 6, 9 ff, 22, 91, 176-7
- Facts *about* Language, 15
- Flash-card Technique, 91
- Form and Structure, 20, 27, 91, 100 ff, 112, 116-17, 121, 123, 127-8, 136
- Grammar, 3, 17, 20, 100 ff.
- Group-Work, 37-8, 41, 195
- Imagery, 132 ff
- Imagination, 16, 50, 55, 60, 68-9, 120, 125, 127, 132, 137, 146, 149, 153, 175, 188 ff
- Literature, 21, 26, 68 ff, 118 ff, 126 ff, 188, 191, 203, 207
- Mechanics of Language, 112 ff
- Metaphor, Simile and other figures, 86, 91, 145
- 'Other Subjects', 8, 22, 45, 57
- Play Production, 20, 41, 152 ff, 159, 203
- Poetry, 118 ff, 126 ff
- Precision of Language, 7-8, 26, 103, 120, 174, 177, 184-6
- Preparation, for writing, etc., 31, 40, 53, 76-7
- Principles, 1 ff, 20, 126, 128
- Prose Study, 27
- Punctuation, 20-1, 28, 112 ff
- Quality - of Experience, Thought, Language, Poem, 12, 16, 34, 55, 63, 70, 110, 120, 130, 137
- Questioning, 47 ff, 56, 58
- Reading, 21, 28, 52 ff, 68 ff 110, 142, 144, 148, 152, 188
- Aloud, 25, 60 ff, 129, 130
- Novel, 204
- Retarded, 208
- Silent, 43 ff
- Responsibility, Pupil, 21, 37, 67, 94, 99, 196
- Speaking, 20, 30, 35 ff, 62, 154
- Specialists, English, 6, 12, 14
- Speech Defects, 25, 35-6, 38, 62-3, 64
- Spelling, 20, 112 ff, 180
- Standards, in Teaching and Learning, 44, 47, 57, 61, 67, 84-5, 87, 94, 144, 171, 177, 184, 202
- Technical Education, English in, 173 ff
- Thinking, Pupil's, 6, 8-9, 14-15, 21, 54, 59, 73, 78, 124, 132, 156, 180, 182, 187
- Value, Perception of, 11, 70, 123, 125, 205
- Vocabulary, 32-3, 77, 91, 175











372.6

QUR

46